IN VIETNAM

Supporting Vietnam’s coffee and pepper development

The Gold Standard Awards 2018

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The Gold Standard Awards 2018

ACIAR Vietnam team is very proud that we have contributed to the development of the Australia in Vietnam Agriculture Strategy, which recently won the “Gold Standard Award for Country or Trade Promotion” at the Public Affairs Asia Gold Standard Awards 2018.

The Strategy highlights Australia’s contributions to Vietnam’s agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors and defines a coordinated and collaborative approach for future activities. Since its release in August 2017, 57 activities have started, with three already complete.

ACIAR currently supports 37 projects in Vietnam, 12 of which are specific to the country and the remainder are part of regional projects. The projects address ACIAR’s high-level objectives and are in line with the three Australia in Vietnam Agriculture Priorities: innovation, economic, and security. Innovation is at the hearts of all ACIAR partnerships, which seek new ways of working in crop and crop-livestock systems, forestry and aquaculture, while ACIAR’s training programs build vital new skillsets to fertilise innovation. In economics, ACIAR aims to improve farmers’ incomes through market linkages. Food safety and climate change are placed under the bilateral security priorities of the two countries.

In the new Strategy 2017-2027, ACIAR Vietnam has identified Central Highland as one of the three geographic foci for our new research programs. ACIAR is designing a project (AGB/2018/175) with funding from our two major Agribusiness (AGB) and Soil and Land Management (SLAM) programs. The project aims to increase the sustainability, productivity and economic value of coffee, black pepper as well as integrated fruit and food crop farming systems and value chains in the Central Highlands region.

During the week of 19-23 November 2018, ACIAR conducted a scoping mission in the Central Highland provinces of Gia Lai, Dak Lak and Dak Nong. We met with leaders from provincial committees and related departments, private sectors and farmers working in the coffee and pepper industries. The discussions and meetings in this scoping trip will inform our two small research activities and contribute to the design of a new project in 2019.

With a strong “research in development” approach, the activities in 2019 will start a ten-year program of work in the Central Highland to address major challenges in soil fertility, pest and disease, market and agribusiness that are affecting the billion dollar exports of coffee and black pepper.

The project will contribute to the broad goal of increasing socio-economic development in the Central Highland region, with three objectives:

1. Develop integrated crop management solutions (ICM) to major soil fertility, pest and disease problems;

2. Identify opportunities for inclusive market and agribusiness-led development;

3. Develop human capability.

We would like to thank our partners, especially IAS (The Institute of Agricultural Science for Southern Vietnam), WASI (the Western Highlands Agriculture & Forestry Science Institute) and ICRAF (the World Agroforestry Centre), CIAT (the International Center for Tropical Agriculture), and CIRAD (The French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development) for coordinating the various activities of this scoping trip; representatives from the Nong Lam University, Tay Nguyen University, Pepper and Coffee associations, private companies and local farmers for joining us in fruitful discussions and meetings during the whole trip. We look forward to working with you when the project officially deploys.

Supporting Vietnam’s coffee and pepper development

Visiting the SAM Agritech pepper-processing factory in Dak Nong province. Photo: ACIAR Vietnam
The 10th Regional Aquafeed Forum - Innovation in aquafeed management

By Dr Nguyen Van Tien, Aquaculture Testing & Accreditation Center, Directorate of Fisheries

The 10th Regional Aquafeed Forum (RAF10) was co-organised by the Directorate of Fisheries - Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam in collaboration with Aquaculture Testing and Accreditation Center, Vietnam National University of Agriculture, Research Institutes for Aquaculture No.1, No.2, No.3, Nha Trang University, and Nong Lam University from 29 September to 1 October 2018 in Hanoi. The theme of RAF10 was “Innovation in Feed Management and Ingredient Utilization for Profitable Aquaculture”.

RAF was first organised in 2009 in Nha Trang under a collaborative project supported by ACIAR on aquaculture feed research. Over the past ten years, RAF has become one of the most important annual events in the field of aquaculture feed and nutrition in Southeast Asia.

The aquafeed industry in Vietnam produces 4.06 million tons of completed feed, valued VND 81,300 billion (AUS 4.73 billion). The industry is continuously expanding with an annual growth rate of 8.6%. This is a great opportunity for the research, production and trade of aquaculture feed and feed ingredients in Vietnam.

RAF10 attracted 160 delegates from ten countries, with representatives from five research institutes, eight universities, 57 enterprises, five international organisations, six state management agencies, two large-scale aquaculture companies and mass media organisations. During the Forum, the participants listened to 26 scientific presentations covering both management and technical aspects of aquaculture feed; interacted with five exhibiting booths of aquafeed products and advanced aquaculture technology; and visited a demonstration site of high-tech shrimp farming, responding to climate change at Binh Minh Fisheries Development Shareholding Company, Kim Son district, Ninh Binh province. The field trip provided first-hand information about the efficiency of formulated feed with higher nutrient specifications suitable for super intensive shrimp farming system as part of the strategy for shrimp farms to overcome cold climate of the harsh winter season in northern Vietnam.

At the Forum, participants actively discussed on new solutions to address the problems facing by the aquaculture feed industry, updated current practices on aquaculture feed management and shared experiences. The notable topics include: development of fermented soy or insect meal as new protein sources to replace fish meal in aquaculture feed; development of shrimp feeds with different nutrient levels to fit with aquaculture systems (semi-intensive, intensive, super-intensive); feeding strategies to optimize nutrient utilization in Pangasius aquaculture; or application of feed formulation software for better feed formulation and feed manufacturing management. The innovative solutions discussed at RAF10 are useful for further development of the aquaculture feed industry, aiming at improving quality, reasonable price, better utilization of feed ingredients by optimizing the formula in grow-out stage of each target species.

For further information, please contact: Nguyen Van Tien <biotien@yahoo.com>.

RAF10 ended with good results and determined that the Nha Trang University will host RAF11 in the 2019 autumn in Nha Trang.
Social impact studies on oyster and giant grouper farming

By Dr Janine Pierce, The University of South Australia

The ACIAR supported Oyster farming in Quang Ninh Province and Giant Grouper fish farming in Khanh Hoa continue to bring prosperity, better lives, new skills, more opportunities and happiness for both men and women.

1. Oyster farming was implemented in 2007 in the Van Don district, Quang Ninh province with assistance from an ACIAR funded project ‘Building bivalve hatchery production capacity in Vietnam and Australia’ (FIS/2010/100). In 2011, Dr Janine Pierce from the University of South Australia with ACIAR representatives conducted a Photovoice study (Photo based community research) with oyster farmers in this area to assess social and economic impact of oyster farming. In July 2018, Dr Pierce came back with ACIAR representatives to conduct a further study to assess sustainability over time. Similar photos and comments were made as in 2011 of financial opportunities, stable jobs for the community, and better life quality from oyster farming. A new question in 2018 on gender and women’s empowerment reported some women owning oyster farms, learning new skills, with equality and harmony between male and female oyster farm workers. A question on climate change impact indicated more severe storms and more parasite issues than in the 2007 study, which impacts on financial return for some. Overall, this oyster project has enhanced the Van Don district in a sustainable way, and oyster farming has become embedded with pride into the community identity.

2. Grouper fish farming for both sea cages and ponds in Nha Trang in Khanh Hoa Province under an ACIAR project with the Research Institute of Aquaculture No3 (RIA 3) was also studied in July 2018 to assess social and economic impact by Dr Janine Pierce in collaboration with ACIAR. The same Photovoice research approach was used as in a similar study of oyster farming, to enable comparisons and consistency in approach. A similar success story was told by grouper fish farmers of more income, more jobs, family happiness, stable lives, skill building, chance to expand their business and advancement, and jobs for women at all levels in Grouper fish roles from research, to owners, to farm workers. Climate change answers related to increasing impact of typhoon damage and water temperature increase and increased negative impact of increased sunlight. As with oyster farming Grouper fish farmers talk of better lives, more income and sustainable jobs and lives since they became involved in grouper fish farming.
On 10 January, ACIAR and agricultural research partners welcomed the New Year by a small gathering at the Australian Embassy in Hanoi. The event aimed at strengthening ACIAR’s engagement with key Vietnamese counterparts, research partners, John Dillon Fellowship (JDF) and John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) alumni. We welcomed more than 60 special guests, including over 20 JDF and JAF alumni.

Speaking at the event, Australian Ambassador Craig Chittick commented: “I am very impressed with what ACIAR has done to help improve research partnerships, capacity building and livelihood of poor farmers, especially women and ethnic minority groups. Over the past 25 years, the Australian Government has invested AUD 100 million in 170 research projects in Vietnam, and at the same time, provided hundreds of postgraduate scholarships for Vietnamese researchers to study in Australia. Many of these scientists are now research leaders”.

At the event, Ambassador Chittick and ACIAR launched the “25 Years ACIAR-Vietnam Collaboration in Agriculture Research” book, highlighting the remarkable achievements in research collaboration. The book also captured the endorsed 2017-2027 strategy, demonstrating the long-term commitment of the two governments in agricultural research to benefit the people of Vietnam, especially the rural poor in the North West Highlands, the Central Highlands and the Mekong Delta regions.

We would like to thank all contributors and editors for insights, research, and their enthusiasms for making this comprehensive report completed. Special appreciation goes to the Chief Editor and ACIAR Policy Council Member Nguyen Van Bo and the JDF alumni Nguyen Van Ba (Hue University), Chau Minh Khoi (Can Tho University), and Phan Thuy Hien (National Institute for Medicinal Materials). Our thanks also go to the ministries, research institutions, international organisations, project leaders and friends for coming to cherish our wonderful collaborative partnership in agriculture.

For a copy of the book, email ACIAR at: aciarvietnam@aciar.gov.au.

Regional Pig Symposium in March 2019

The smallholder pig industry plays an important role in many South and Southeast Asia countries. The International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the University of Queensland, Australia supported by Launch Funding from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) are organizing a regional symposium on smallholder pig production, health, and pork safety in Vietnam from 27-29 March 2019. The symposium aims to:

- Share experiences and challenges in research on smallholder pig health, production and pork safety
- Discuss and explore gender aspects in pig and pork production
- Facilitate networks on pig research including the South-South exchange.

Participants will be from ACIAR-funded projects based in Vietnam, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Laos and Indonesia, along with those affiliated with other regional developing country research and development organisations or the private sector.

For further information of the Symposium, you can contact Ms Thanh Nguyen, ILRI at t.l.nguyen@cgiar.org or visit ILRI website at https://wp.me/pMD56-Oj.
Commencement of three new agribusiness research projects

The second half of 2018 was a busy time for ACIAR’s agribusiness program in Vietnam, with three new research projects being kicked-off. The projects expand from policy to grass-root levels across the country. In these projects, Vietnamese policy-makers and scientists are working with Australian researchers to help attract investment in agricultural sector, create inclusive agricultural value chains and improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

Improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers in Dong Thap and Tien Giang through market development in mango supply chains in southern Vietnam is the key focus of the new ACIAR project, recently launched in September 2018.

Photo: ACIAR Vietnam

Mango supply chains to support the Mekong Delta

Australia has special partnerships with the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. In September 2018, ACIAR launched a new project to help improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers in Dong Thap and Tien Giang provinces through market development in mango supply chains.

The project is run by researchers from Griffith University, in collaboration with the researchers from Vietnam institutions SIAEP (the Sub-Institute of Agricultural Engineering and Post-Harvest Technology), SOFRI (the Southern Fruit Research Institute), SCAP (the Southern Centre for Agriculture Policy of IPSARD) and international institutions CIRAD (The French Agricultural Research Centre For International Development) and CIP (the International Potato Center).

The project is aiming at increasing capacity for Vietnamese participating institutions; improving collaboration among key stakeholders including local government and private sectors and; finding innovative pathways for the mango sector development in southern Vietnam.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE PROJECT LEADER:
Dr Robin Roberts, Griffith University
Email: Robin.Roberts@griffith.edu.au
Improving policies to attract investment in the agricultural sector

In August 2018, ACIAR kicked-off a project to help Vietnam improve policies for attracting investment in agricultural sector.

According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, there are only 3,844 enterprises with investment in agriculture and these accounts for only 1% of the total number of reviewed enterprises (420,251). Reforming the support policy for investment by enterprises will certainly bring benefits to agribusiness as they could easily assess credit, land and public services. With increased business investment, Vietnam’s government may then be able to release some of the budget burden and thus allow the state’s funds to be more wisely allocated for poverty reduction or other critical issues.

Farmers and households are especially likely to benefit from such a policy evaluation if well-directed policy changes are made. Due to climate change, the integration with international markets and other emerging issues as indicated above, farmers will need to learn more about technologies, food safety, farming skills and market information. As well, the business sector will need to learn more about operating within the agricultural sector. As long as a strong relationship between farmers and non-farm enterprise operators is developed, it will help farmers to overcome some of their challenges.

The project is a partnership with Vietnam’s Ministry of Planning and Investment (Department for Agricultural Economics), Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) and University of Sydney. It will review policies and suggest solutions for attracting enterprises to invest in the agricultural sector in Vietnam. The project will address the research aim through workshops, desktop reviews, surveys and economic analysis throughout 2019.

For further information, please contact the project leader:
Dr Tihomir Ancev, the University of Sydney
Email: Tihomir.Ancev@sydney.edu.au
On 17 September 2018, the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD), in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), held a workshop entitled “Inclusive Agricultural Value Chain Financing and 4.0 Technologies Application” in Hanoi.

This activity was within the two institutes’ cooperation framework and funded by ACIAR. Attending the workshop were representatives of the State Bank of Vietnam, Vietnam Banking Association, Cooperative Alliance, Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Bao Viet Insurance Company, and enterprises investing in agriculture, experts from domestic and international research institutes and universities.

Dr Khin Pwint Oo from Yangoon University, Myanmar shared about the effective credit model in the presentation “Credit Experience from Myanmar”. Leaders, experts in the banking and insurance sectors of Vietnam also shared about “Credit Policy Orientation to encourage high-tech application and value chain integration in agricultural production, Financing Policy for Agriculture - Insurance solutions”.

The workshop also heard from Dr Le Thanh - Director of Institute of Organic Agricultural Technology on “Credit Financing Model in the vegetable and fruit value chain” and from Mr. Pham Xuan Hoe, Deputy Director of the Institute of Banking Strategy, The State bank of Viet Nam on “4.0 Technology Integration to manage the Agricultural Value Chain Financing in Vietnam”.

The workshop was the first step of a four-year research activity, conducted in three countries of Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar, with the participation of experts from the United States and Australia.

Opening workshop, Dr Nguyen Do Anh Tuan - Director General of IPSARD - stated that Vietnam’s agriculture after 30 years of innovation was going to a new stage - a period of transition, large-scale production, demand for technology application, value chain linkage... in which there was an urgent need for capital. The current value chain is incomplete. However, there were already about 7,600 enterprises investing in agriculture, twice as much as the previous two years. The role of credit policies, public service, and banking policies is important in the context that small farmers often find it difficult to access to the credit needed to invest in seedlings or new technologies, dealing with risks from harvesting to cultivation.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE PROJECT LEADER:
Dr Alan de Brauw, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
Email: a.debrauw@cgiar.org
Towards a temperate fruit industry association in Son La

By Dr Oleg Nicetic

In May 2018, the ACIAR temperate fruit project AGB/2012/060 “Improving smallholder incomes in the North-Western highlands of Vietnam by increasing access and competitiveness in regional temperate markets” held its final review workshop in Moc Chau. The project team introduced the idea of forming a temperate fruit industry association of Son La province to various stakeholders, including local government and private business/cooperatives working in this industry.

The Association will address key constraints of temperate fruit development in Son La, which the project has identified: (1) lack of coordination between different stakeholders in the private sector, and between private sector and local government; (2) un-coordinated government-led sector planning with little basis on market information, and (3) the under-developed nursery industry, which still lacks access to modern varieties (due to inability to conform to international standards on variety protection) and thus still heavily relies on few varieties with short harvest time. At the end of the workshop, a working group was formed to develop Temperate Fruit Association in Son La province.

As a follow-up of the initiative, in October 2018, the project team organised a study tour in Australia for four delegates from Son La, including three members of association working group (Mr Ha Van Lan – Director of Son La Seedling Centre; Mr Mai Duc Thinh – Director of 19/5 Agricultural Service Cooperative; and Mr Pham Van Quyet – nursery owner and temperate fruit grower in Moc Chau), and Ms Cam Thi Phong- Deputy Director of Son La DARD. The group visited one of Australia’s leading avocado nurseries to look at modern seedlings production practices, which place emphasis on maintaining phytosanitary standards and providing robust and healthy trees to farmers. Visits to several leading stonefruit and persimmon businesses across Northern and Central New South Wales and South East Queensland were also organised to gain an understanding of different production and packing practices – including variety selection; irrigation, nutrition, pest & disease and canopy management systems; harvesting; handling; packing and supply chain processes. As these visits coincided with harvest, the group was able to see fruit of different low chill peach and nectarine varieties and discuss their attributes with the Australian growers. Australian growers also explained the importance of new licenced varieties on the development of their business. Montague Fresh, Australia’s largest stonefruit producer and marketer hosted the group at Brisbane Markets. This provided the opportunity to see the organisation of fruit trading and understand the cool chain infrastructure employed to maintain fruit quality. The delegation was able to see a range of different low chill stonefruit varieties and packaging available on the market floor.

To study example of industry association and how it can support the development of an industry, the group visited The Australian Macadamia Society (AMS). They discussed the importance of setting a strategic direction, provision of services and advocacy on behalf of their members, engaging with stakeholders, communications, facilitation of linkages, and sourcing funding. The visiting group was particularly interested in the learnings from AMS, as they are currently considering this approach to support the development of their own temperate fruit industries in Northern Vietnam.

The project organisers would like to thank all of those that supported the visit, including: Mr Mark Napper, Mr Rod Dalton, Mr Ross Stuhmcke, Mr Hamish Montague and staff, Mr Gavin Porter, Mr Graham Anderson and staff, Mr Jolyon Burnett and staff, and Mr Shane Hetherington and Mr Kevin Dodds from NSW Department of Primary Industries.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE PROJECT LEADER:
Dr Oleg Nicetic, the University of Queensland
Email: O.Nicetic1@uq.edu.au
The Southeast Asia Regional Gender Workshop was held on 15-16 November 2018 with 123 participants including 10 H’mong ethnic minority farmers and five ethnic minority university students. Participants came from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam. Fifteen group sessions were organized on various topics, such as talking with farmers, sharing insights from recent gender integration activities, discussing masculinities, influencing policies, understanding the roles of NGOs in agricultural research, discussing masculinities, influencing policies, understanding the roles of NGOs in agricultural research, discussing masculinities, influencing policies, understanding the roles of NGOs in agricultural research, discussing masculinities, influencing policies, understanding the roles of NGOs in agricultural research, discussing masculinities, influencing policies, understanding the roles of NGOs in agricultural research, discussing masculinities, influencing policies, understanding the roles of NGOs in agricultural research.

This workshop created safe and open spaces for everyone to speak, listen to and share their experiences regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, gender and social positions. Participants were impressed and inspired by listening to the real voices of the ethnic minority farmers and minority students who, despite many social barriers, try hard to transform their situations.

There are four key insights from the workshop. First, we found that the issue of gender is more or less common across Southeast Asia. The social landscape of rural areas is rapidly changing through male and female labour migration, the absence of youth, and women’s increased mobility, education and access to information. On the other hand, restricted gender norms strongly persist such as the persistence of stereotypical masculinities, male-favoured land ownership laws, and women’s under-representation in decision-making processes both at household and government levels. As such, it was very clear that men and women farmers have different challenges, opportunities and capacities to engage in new agricultural technology, and agricultural researchers should consider such differences in their approaches to research to agricultural development.

Second, participants shared various participatory approaches to integrating gender into agricultural value-chain research. We all recognized that understanding gender norms and relations was a critical starting-point for designing gender-responsive agricultural interventions. Also, the farmers revealed that photos and videos were powerful tools for them in communicating with agricultural researchers.

Third, the farmers’ active participation and their interactions with researchers were highlights in this workshop. Women farmers, in particular, felt greatly empowered and gained confidence through participating in this event. The farmers from Dien Bien travelled 500km by bus to the venue in Hanoi. During the study tour to supermarkets and local markets, they realized that very little agricultural produce from their region was sold in Hanoi. They were inspired by another group of farmers from Moc Chau who sell their vegetable in Hanoi’s supermarkets. The male farmers learnt that women farmers are able to travel to Hanoi and speak in public even better than themselves. They realized the importance of gender from our discussions of it for these two days.

Lastly, the workshop facilitated networking among the participants from different countries and different or the same backgrounds. Although the project is ending soon, we do hope that integrating gender in agricultural research will continue through these newly created networks, and participants’ motivation and willingness. This workshop was funded and organized by an ACIAR small research activity (SRA) on gender integration in Vietnam: AGB/2017/008 with International Potato Center (CIP), Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS), CARE International Vietnam and Oxfam Vietnam. We thank all participants for their contribution.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE PROJECT LEADER:
Dr Nozomi Kawarazuka
International Potato Center
Email: N.kawarazuka@cgiar.org
The North West region is one of the poorest parts in Vietnam. Around 66 percent of ethnic minority people living in this mountainous and remote area are poor. Moreover, their livelihood mainly depends on agriculture and forestry activities. Consequently, livestock production has been considered as an important pathway out of poverty for the local people.

Until now, improved cattle production has been explored from different aspects, including using farm-grown fodder, growing improved forage species, and applying value chain. The effectiveness of these solutions has been recognized in many areas in Vietnam. Nevertheless, smallholder cattle production has not been comprehensively considered from a gender perspective. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), gender equality and empowering women are critical for agricultural development (FAO, 2011). Specifically, if women had equal access to resources (including land, credit, market information, and decision-making powers) with men, agriculture productivity would increase by up to 30%.

It is well-established that gender roles vary between geographical locations, cultures, agricultural enterprises and socio-economic contexts. This means that the role of women in cattle production needs to be investigated carefully for each particular setting. In the North West region, women are actively involved in smallholder beef cattle production activities. However, their role in such production systems has not been well understood. Moreover, the participation of women in decision-making for practice change is not known. There may also be differences between Kinh and ethnic minorities (e.g. H’mong, Thai and Dao, etc.) regarding the role and influence of women in cattle production. Therefore, it is of importance to conduct a comprehensive study on the role and participation of rural women in cattle production systems in this region.

Within the scope of the ACIAR project LPS/2015/037 on ‘Intensification of beef cattle production in upland cropping systems in North West Vietnam’, in line with the objective of promoting women’s economic empowerment, there will be a study on the impacts of women’s knowledge of household livelihoods on decision-making in smallholder cattle production systems. The aim of this work is to provide useful information about current and potential roles of Kinh and ethnic minority women in Vietnamese smallholder cattle production for policy makers, donors, as well as practitioners involved in agricultural development. This research also helps to identify opportunities for women to further participate in and benefit from cattle production. In addition, it is worth mentioning that this kind of study aligns with Vietnam’s National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011–2020 (GVN, 2012) and Australia’s investment in the Aid Investment Plan for 2016–2020 that commit to narrowing the gender gap in the economy, especially for rural and ethnic minority women in the livestock section. This work will be conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion for data collection, followed by computer-aided data analysis and evaluation.

REFERENCES:

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Dr. Stephen Ives, Tasmania University
Email: Stephen.Ives@utas.edu.au
Researchers from the ‘Market-based approach to improving the safety of pork in Vietnam’, or SafePORK project, have partnered with the private sector and international experts to design locally fit interventions that can be scaled up and sustained to improve the safety of pork in Vietnam. Two potential interventions that have been discussed late 2018 are the pilot of ozone technology to disinfect water in the slaughterhouse and the use of ‘nudges’ to change the behaviours of actors along the value chain.

Ozonation involves using ozone — a naturally occurring gas with greater disinfection effectiveness than chemicals — to clean water. The use of ozonised water has been identified as a critical point for intervention at slaughter to reduce microbiological contamination in the pork value chain. SafePORK has partnered with Aqua 21, a private company in the United Kingdoms which promotes safe water solutions and designs innovative “brief case sized” ozone units.

A scoping mission was organised by SafePORK partners for Aqua 21 representatives in October 2018 to understand the context of Vietnam and decide on the size of the ozone unit and type of slaughterhouses to be targeted. During the mission they visited several slaughterhouses, most of them previously involved in the ‘Reducing pig diseases and improving food safety in smallholder pig value chains in Vietnam’, or PigRISK project in Hung Yen and Hanoi (Soc Son district). Compliance of owners was explored, and potential challenges were identified.

Findings from the scoping mission were then presented at a SafePORK meeting held 30 October 2018 in Hanoi. At the meeting, Aqua 21 representatives (Courtney Peyton and Trevor Costello) presented the installation of
the ozone unit and how to use the ozonation technology within the pork value chain in the country. They highlighted that the ozone technology has been used globally, adopted worldwide in various agriculture and food systems. They pointed out advantages of using the portable “brief case size” ozone machine including its cost effectiveness, complexity, adaptability and scalability. They emphasized that the installation should go along with improved hygienic slaughter and an underlying behavioural change of actors.

In addition to the installation of ozone machine, the SafePORK team discussed the use of ‘nudges’ that are interventions with a low level of intrusiveness on personal choice that can be used to alter the behaviour of people, in this case value chain actors in the pork value chain.

To explore the best nudges that could be used to support the proposed interventions and to discuss the practical aspects of implementing nudges in the pork value chain a workshop was held in Hanoi late November 2018 co-led by the Royal Veterinary Collage (RVC) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). Participants included slaughterhouse workers, retailers, veterinarians, government officials, and researchers from the Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA), the National Institute of Animal Science (NIAS), the Hanoi University of Public Health (HUPH), ILRI and RVC. During the group session, participants were exposed to various nudges concepts such as using posters with certain colours and shapes and positive or negative food safety supporting messages.

The idea of using posters to convey food safety related information in an attempt to change actor’s behaviour was perceived positive by actors. All participants emphasized to have site-specific pictures on posters to reflect the real context of the setting to increase engagement with the media. When considering the colours to be used for posters, red was seen to act as a warning for poor hygiene.

Site-specific nudges will be developed by the research team in a participatory process with targeted pork value chain actors to support the proposed interventions under SafePORK.

The SafePORK project is funded by ACIAR and led by ILRI.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE PROJECT LEADER:
Dr Fred Unger, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
Email: F.Unger@cgiar.org
Initial results of the maize-based research

By Ngo Duc Minh1,2, Tran Minh Tien1, Luu Ngoc Quyen1, Oleg Nicetic4, Michael Bell4

Commencing in July 2017, researchers and scientists from the Vietnam, Laos and Australia have been working on an ACIAR project: ‘Improving maize-based farming systems on sloping lands in Vietnam and Lao PDR’. Funded by ACIAR, the project aims to conduct research that supports the adoption of improved and diversified maize-based farming systems that reduce soil degradation, and improve smallholder livelihoods and economic viability on sloping lands in northern mountains of Vietnam and Lao PDR.

Agronomic field-experiments and demonstrations

During the first year of implementation, this project has begun developing and testing diversified and more sustainable maize-based farming systems in Son La and Houaphan. Participatory field-trials are comparing conventional land preparation practices growing annual maize crops to six (Son La) and four (Houaphan) alternate systems that involve the integration of forages, legumes crops or fruit trees. Based on a short list of crop options developed in the early stages of the project though value chains survey for development of maize and complementary crops, forages and livestock to support more diverse and sustainable maize-based farming systems, these treatments are focused on options that may have some chance of improving soil quality and reducing erosion, as well as being profitable and likely to be adopted. Using a broad clustering approach within which local preferences can be accommodated, the project has come up with four strategies on which systems can be based, depending on the preferences of focus groups/communities. These are:

The local extension worker and Laotian participants discussing during the field-learning session of training course on sustainable maize-based farming systems on slopping land. Photo: Ngo Duc Minh, SFRI/VAAS
• Improved/stabilized annual maize systems
• Relay cropping of maize followed by a second maize crop or food legumes
• Strip cropping maize and forages for cut-and- remove livestock fodder
• Alley cropping maize and fruit trees (plums, longan… etc.)

Senior project staffs from Australia, Vietnam and Laos have provided mentoring to local staff in Son La (Vietnam) and Houaphan (Lao PDR) in terms of project and agronomic experimental design, systems evaluation and agronomic management. SFRI and NOMAFSI staff have also been continuously providing technical support and mentoring to provincial staff in Houaphan.

Capacity building activities

During the first year, two formal training events were conducted. The first was in Moc Chau, where the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework for the project was introduced to Vietnamese and Laotian staff (August 2017). The second was conducted in Houaphan (March 2018) considering finer scale M&E of project activities, as well as experimental design and conduct.

Additionally, a technical training workshop for Laos provincial staff and farmers from the target villages in Houaphan has also been completed. A total of 18 Laotian technicians and local farmers attended the course in Son La from 23-27 July 2018. The course was organized jointly by SFRI and NOMAFSI in collaboration with the University of Queensland (UQ), who have wealth of experience in participatory approaches in project implementation. The brand of “learning by seeing, learning by doing” has been adopted after many years of development work in Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam. During this visit, participants attended a one-day-classroom session with lectures, video presentations, interactive inputs and discussion at North-West Agri-Forestry R&D Center in Son La, with Laotian participants. After this, they conducted a field trip visiting the research and demonstration sites on farms at Chieng Hac, Na Ka (Moc Chau district), Chieng Di (Van Ho district), and Hat Lot (Mai Son district). During the field visit, Laotian participants met with local extension workers and Vietnamese maize farmers and were given insights into approaches that were being considered as a means of improving the sustainability and diversity (from both crop rotation and income perspectives) of maize-based systems. The local farmers and communities also provided living examples of how their incomes and livelihoods had improved through implementation of more sustainable soil management practices and diversified production systems.

At the end of the four-day course, the participants achieved a number of outcomes. These included an enhanced understanding of sustainable farming practices/technologies (T&P) applicable on sloping lands, gained through experiential and field learning, and insights from members of the participating communities as to which of these T&P practices may be the best fit for maize-based systems in Son La. The visit also strengthened coordination between the Laos and Vietnam project partners, as well as engaging the local communities who are involved in planned activities of the project. At the conclusion of this visit, a full 7-10 days course was suggested for a broader target audience in Houaphan, involving farmers and the extension and training communities in the respective districts where the project is focused.

1 Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS)  
2 Soils and Fertilizers Research Institute (SFRI)  
3 Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (NOMAFSI)  
4 University of Queensland (UQ)

For further information, please contact the Project Leader:
Dr. Michael Bell, University of Queensland 
Email: m.bell4@uq.edu.au
Rice-shrimp farming systems are common in the Mekong Delta where rice is farmed in the wet season, and shrimp in the dry season using the same land area and water resources. Rice is normally grown on a rice-platform surrounded by a water ditch where shrimp, crabs and fish can be stocked. Some farms also include a freshwater reservoir and an intensive grow-out pond for shrimp. Shrimp is often preferred over fish and crabs because of the higher price. In recent years, high water and soil salinity, caused by severe dry seasons and increased demand for fresh water, has severely impacted rice production. Shrimp have also been affected by degraded water quality, particularly high water temperatures, chronically low dissolved oxygen concentrations, and periodic high salinity.

The ACIAR Project SMCN/2010/083 was implemented to identify the risk factors for poor crop production, test a modified farm design, evaluate the benefits of farming rice and shrimp together, and to develop better management practices to overcome environmental problems that have plagued the industry. The project launched in 2013 and has undergone a mid-term and final review, which both made positive recommendations that have helped improve the project. The project was extended for another 2 years due to better management practices, which require further field testing before being scaled-out to farmers. The project also expanded its research to another commune to compare severe and more moderate salinity conditions. Although the project faced difficult challenges because of unusual extreme climatic conditions in the first two years, the perseverance of the team, and support from ACIAR and partner agencies in Vietnam and Australia, produced significant research and management outputs.
The first phase of the project focussed on identifying risk factors for both rice and shrimp, as well as developing an understanding of nutrient dynamics and water and soil processes in the farming system. Multiple methods were used, and a whole-of-team effort and engagement with farmers was involved. The team has several core sub-groups focussing on soils, water quality, shrimp production and rice production, with overlapping research planning and activities, and integrated approaches to data analysis.

Several Bayesian Belief Networks (BBNs) have or are being developed under the project. BBNs are a method to develop a graphical representation of causal relationships of a system, such as a rice-shrimp farming system. The nature of the relationships in the network is described using probabilities.

The first BBN involved gathering information from farmers to identify farming risk factors, as perceived by farmers. They were the main source of knowledge and were considered the experts in the process. This BBN provided a foundation for making decisions for more targeted research, and contributed to designing and testing better management practices. The team also used statistical analysis to identify key risk factors from field and laboratory data to identify and understand farming risk factors. The BBN work and laboratory and field data on risk factors have been published in international journals.

The second BBN is drawing on scientific expertise from the experience and knowledge of the research team and the research done during the project. This “scientific BBN” will be developed further in 2018 once data from all rice and shrimp crops have been analysed. With several seasons and multiple trials, the scientific BBN will be robust and complement other scientific outputs from the project.

The third BBN, better described as a Bayesian Decision Network (BDN), incorporates information on farming costs and revenue into the scientific knowledge already captured by the second BBN. This helps identify probable outcomes, in terms of revenue, from different decisions a farmer can make through the growing season. The BDN will help drive decisions on which practices are cost-effective, and to evaluate, much like a cost-benefit analysis, the different farming options. A linked socio-economic study contributes additional information on the cost-effectiveness of different management approaches and farming options. The goal is to ensure the knowledge and information from the project helps farmers to make sensible decisions for economically sustainable better management practices. The BDN will also contribute to an overall socio-economic study of rice-shrimp farming.

The team is producing a smart phone application for extension officers from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Research (DARD) and farmers. The smart phone app will help to make better and easier farming decisions based on factors that are known to influence farm production.

In the laboratory and at field sites, the research team, farmers and Australian and Vietnamese students have been running experiments to better understand the system’s soil and water processes and how they affect the two crops. The studies found that water in the soil was often too saline, more than the surface waters that are normally used as an indicator of soil salinity. The soil salinity causes poor rice growth and seed production. This knowledge was used to develop and successfully test methods to wash the rice platform soils to reduce salinity. The project also found that organic waste from the shrimp crop could be used to replace fertiliser on the rice platform thereby reducing farming costs and retaining waste on site, rather than discharging it into nearby waterways. This knowledge has helped save fertiliser and labour costs, and benefitted the downstream environment.

Extensive testing of salt-tolerant rice varieties has also helped to improve rice crops. The project is now able to recommend the most appropriate rice varieties for the predicted seasonal conditions. Rice crops at trial sites have been successful whereas they have failed where farmers are yet to adopt the technologies.

The success of the rice crops has drawn attention from nearby farmers who have started to adopt the technologies. The team has also commenced a dissemination program, which will expand in 2019 once all the field research is completed and written up.

The team is publishing the research in peer-reviewed journals, but also now moving towards preparing less technical information for extension officers and farmers.

Research on shrimp growth performance is continuing and presents some challenges. The project showed that shrimp are stressed by high water temperature influenced by the more saline water and high evaporation rates. Although the system’s water supply has sufficient nitrogen, the natural food availability is low because of the high water temperature affecting the ditch ecosystem. The chronically low dissolved oxygen concentrations
also stress the shrimp, as well as limiting natural food production. Farmers use an extensive farming approach that involves using natural food rather than supplemented feed. By contrast, shrimp farmed in more intensive components of the system grow much better, but intensification of the ditch presents economic challenges because of the cost of aerating the water and the need for supplementary shrimp feed. The project is currently analysing shrimp growth and ditch and canal water quality data from several crops. The data are being used to build a shrimp growth model to better understand the issues. The BBNs also contribute to the increasing understanding of how shrimp perform under different environmental and management scenarios. There is scope for future research to build on the findings of this project to develop and test a re-design of the system and ‘improved extensive’ approaches to farming that can help reduce stress in shrimp and improve their nutritional status.

Our project has a strong focus on maintaining a sense of ‘team’. The team is multidisciplinary with skills and experience in soil science, agriculture, fish and shrimp health, statistics, extension, microbiology, social science and aquaculture in general. Communication between the team members and their respective institutions, and with farmers, commune representatives and lead farmers, has been effective for the collaboration. Importantly, the project team has benefited from farmer engagement. Farmers have permitted research on their farms, followed field trial protocols, and helped to collect and interpret data. The role of DARD in facilitating farmer interaction is commendable.

Capacity building has been undertaken at different levels. Research capacity building involved training laboratory staff in Vietnam on new or improved analytical methods including rigorous data quality control measures. Vietnamese researchers have also been trained in new environmental assessment, particularly field and laboratory methods, and one team member is completing his PhD, under a John Allwright Fellowship, on a related topic at Griffith University. Australian researchers have broadened their skills and experiences by working with the Vietnamese team members. Skills in building BBNs have also been developed through project-based training and with support from the Crawford Fund. Research capacity building has been a great success with the team capably undertaking research for which the findings have and will be published in international journals. This is an important measure of the quality of the research.

Farmer capacity building is both formal and informal. By working with researchers, farmers are learning about better farming practices, and seeing such practices produce good crops has fostered interest and a desire to know more. Formal training such as workshops involves disseminating knowledge from the research and demonstrating the tested improved farming practices.

The number of workshops will increase in the remaining year of the project with the bulk of the
research now completed. Farmers are upfront about the practicalities of modified practices, and the feedback helps the researchers to refine and reconsider options for future trials. Farmer advice ensures the research meets their needs and is cost effective.

As for many ACIAR projects, the research is also benefiting Australia. Researchers from UNSW, Griffith University and Charles Sturt University have gained knowledge and expertise, which can be applied to local rice and prawn production issues. Australian students and interns have worked alongside the Vietnamese researchers, thereby building their research skills along with an understanding of project management. Students have been inspired to work overseas, with some students now more confident in their career choices. The scientific outputs also provide knowledge that can potentially be applied to extensive aquaculture by indigenous communities in northern Australia. Similarly, with Australia facing drier conditions and increasing salinisation of soils, rice farmers stand to benefit from the knowledge generated by the project.

Research planning is a whole-of-team effort, regardless of the disciplinary background of the team members. The team’s success is also underpinned by the partnership with DARD and farmers. Information flows between the researchers, extension officers and farmers, and with regular engagement, the team has been able to rethink and revise the research. Lead farmers, who we consider as ‘champions’ or ‘advocates’, help to share the knowledge and to foster relationships with other farmers. Women lead farmers have played a key role in engaging more women.

The Australians on the project appreciate the enthusiasm and hospitality of the Vietnamese researchers and farmers. We have learned from each other, and as the project has progressed, the team has grown stronger and has become more efficient. Importantly, no single partner on the project dominates; we all have shared goals and an egalitarian approach to how we implement the project. The mix of experience has also been beneficial. Older and more experienced researchers have been mentoring early-career researchers on the project, and following some retirements, mid-career researchers have stepped up to higher responsibilities. It has been uplifting to see young Australian and Vietnamese students share their aspirations with more senior team members and each other. Nationality, level of experience and disciplinary background have not hindered sharing; rather, the differences have enriched the research experience for all, particularly for younger researchers and students.

Farmers have taken a risk to participate - changing how you have farmed the land to help researchers run field trials involves significant trust and risk. Very often farmers around the world, quite understandably, are suspicious of research and new advice. The team has been fortunate to have DARD officers help build trust. Trust has also been earned by working with the farmers. They have seen the dedication of the team and understand that researchers do not just sit at desks or laboratory benches – they participate in on-farm sample collection alongside the farmers. Regular field visits, and team members living on site to collect data, have shown the high level of commitment of the team. Farmers are always welcoming and share meals, resources and their time with the team. Attendance at workshops and research planning meetings is always high.

Although the research has focussed on farms in Ca Mau, the team has also run workshops in Kien Giang and Bac Lieu, and will be returning to these and other locations to communicate the research findings in 2019. The team also shares research findings with MARD and informs decision-making on land-use zoning. Knowledge from the project will also contribute to decisions on how to use the soil and water resources in a rapidly changing environment; climate change and increasing pressure on resources requires a good understanding of the risk factors that farmers will face as their farms experience environment change.
New elements in ACIAR’s scholarship programs

Building capacity to inform scientific understanding and the design and implementation of policy is core to ACIAR’s mandate. To undertake this work, ACIAR deploy capacity building approaches throughout all of its research activities, including investments in projects, fellowships, and interactions with Australian and developing-country scientists and project staff. The two traditional ACIAR fellowships are the John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) and John Dillon Fellowship (JDF). There are new elements in both JAF and JDF recently.

FROM JAF TO JAFEL

JAF provides scientists from partner countries who are involved in ACIAR research projects with the opportunity to obtain postgraduate qualifications at Australian universities. From January 2019, ACIAR introduces a new Capacity Building initiative, branded as the John Allwright Fellowship Executive Leadership (JAFel) Program. The new program will equip the current and future JAF fellows with management and leadership skills essential to become effective leaders in their future roles, capable of driving change and excellence in agricultural research. It was designed in response to feedback that post-graduate agricultural researchers also require executive training to be effective leaders and managers in their home countries.

TWO ROUNDS OF JDF PER YEAR

JDF aims to develop leadership skills for young outstanding agricultural research managers from ACIAR partner countries. JDF used to open only one round per year over the last 15 years. Since 2018 ACIAR has decided to run two rounds of JDF. The first round is organised in October/November for individuals. The second round is held in May/June offering as the “institutional” JDF. The first institutional cohort will focus on PNG and Pacific region.

To date, ACIAR has awarded 75 JAFs and 19 JDFs to the Vietnamese scientists. The scholarship programs contributed significantly to improve capacity of scientific community of Vietnam. Many alumni have been holding important positions in the research institutions or become leading specialists of Vietnam.
My name is Nguyen Khoi Nghia. I work at the Department of Soil Sciences, College of Agriculture, Can Tho University, Vietnam. I was one of the privileged fourteen fellows in the second cohort of the ACIAR John Dillon Fellowship, which took place in Australia from October 20th to November 30th, 2018. During that time, we attended the executive leadership training in Agricultural Research Management under the support of ACIAR.

My experience with the John Dillon Fellowship has provided me with many opportunities, chiefly the relationships established with other fellows from Australia, China, Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines, Samoa, Vanuatu and Uganda. I also got a better understanding of different cultures, which has taught me to practice patience in order to avoid conflict due to cultural differences. In addition, I truly value the workshops at the University of Sunshine Coast, and the opportunity to visit many research institutions, agri-business companies and host institution excursions.

We were warmly welcomed by the ACIAR team during our first few days in Canberra and gained a deeper understanding of the organisation’s structure and operations. We were also shown the diversity of ACIAR’s portfolio of projects and taught how to prepare successful concept notes. Throughout the program, we also had the chance to network with Australian agricultural scientists, which helped establish a good connection for future collaborations. The visits to agribusiness sites also taught us how to manage a successful and sustainable business. As the weeks progressed, I had the opportunity to develop my communication and leadership skills through activities that emphasized on stakeholder and risk management, value-based planning and project governance.

The last segment in our fellowship was the opportunity to learn through institutional hosting and mentoring. I had the opportunity to be hosted by Deakin University in Melbourne, which opened the door to further networking opportunities with different individuals from the university, company, and research institutions. I gained varied insights in both science and agriculture, which will no doubt contribute to my career development in future.

Overall, the John Dillon fellowship has provided me with invaluable knowledge for my career in research. I look forward to applying my knowledge to lead my university’s department in the sustainable development of agriculture, while working towards developing Can Tho University as a leader in the field of agricultural science within Vietnam. I am excited to share my experience working with ACIAR and USC with my colleagues back home and am humbly grateful for the opportunity to develop my capacity as a leader in the field of research.
I am Pham Kieu My, a John Allwright Fellow. After my graduation in 2015, the Hanoi City’s Department of Home Affairs offered me a job as a government staff on administration. However, as I had been interested in agriculture research since I was a student, I chose to pursue my desire to become a researcher at the Department of Quantitative Analysis, Faculty of Economics and Rural Development, Vietnam National University of Agriculture.

Since then I have involved in some ACIAR research projects related to value chains of agricultural products, such as vegetable, fruit, pork and beef and related issues. Most of those projects take place in the north-western provinces of Vietnam. The ultimate purpose of these projects is to help improve the livelihood of poor people in the region. In those projects, various research activities are conducted, including market research; analysis of actors in value chain of agricultural products, and the relationships between these actors; running trainings and workshops to share information, experiences between stakeholders and aiming improvement of their relationships along the value chains.

During a number of field trips, I found that there is a weak link among actors even among farmers; it is also difficult for farmers to access the market. Therefore, improvement of market knowledge and access of producers; participation of social organisations supporting farmers and others actors in the value chains are needed in the future. This is a purpose of my master research in UTAS, which is funded and supported by ACIAR through the John Allwright Fellowships program.

Applications for the 2020 John Allwright Fellowship Program (JAF) are now open!

Deadline: Monday 30 April 2019

For the 2020 intake, the Training Committee will select up to 12 recipients, with at least 6 fellowships awarded to women. This is in line with ACIAR’s Gender Equity Policy.

The JAF Program is a subset of the Australia Awards Program that serves the particular interest of ACIAR’s work and our partner organisations. ACIAR’s John Allwright Fellowship recipients are scientists from partner developing countries who are actively involved in a research project supported by ACIAR.

More information can be read at:
Facebook: @ACIARAustralia
Contact: Ms. Nguyen Thi Lan Phuong at Phuong.Nguyen@aciar.gov.au
Interview with a researcher

Dr Nozomi Kawarazuka is the leader of the Project “Integrating gender and social inclusion into agricultural value chain research in Vietnam” (AGB/2017/008). She and her team carried out research on gender through a range of selected agricultural value chains, ethnic and cultural, and geographic contexts in Vietnam. She is not only a research leader, but a passionate traveller, gardener and a cook! Let’s have a chat with her now.

Chào chị (Hi) Nozomi, thanks for joining this interview with ACIAR. Can you share with us about your work with the International Potato Center (CIP) especially during the time you are in Vietnam?

My research is focused on gender and social dimensions of agriculture, as I seek to raise the voices of the marginalized social groups so that they are reflected in agricultural policies and practices. In the past three years, I conducted several case studies in ethnic minority villages in Vietnam with local partners. My research employs anthropological approaches, using biographies of men and women farmers, as well as participatory communication methods such as videos and photos. We found that men and women within the same community and even the same household have very different interests, needs and capacities in agriculture. Conventional agricultural interventions are often designed by men and tend to fit with male farmers’ interests and needs. But, I feel that agriculture should change to meet the needs of women and men respectively. Although anthropology is marginalized subject in agricultural research, I am proud of my work, which can contribute to addressing gender and social equity in Vietnam.

Please share about your work with ACIAR in the gender project. What brought you to this new area and so what have been the challenges (if any) to you? Your most memorable experience with this?

In this project, we tried to strengthen agricultural researchers’ capacity to verbalize and visualise hidden gender and social power relations. Before, women’s voices were often not properly listened to because women’s real needs were hidden and therefore invisible to researchers. Also, ethnic minority women farmers were not given appropriate communication means to raise their voices. To overcome these issues, agricultural researchers needed to change, to challenge their own gender bias, which was a critical first step. As you saw in the regional workshop, there is a growing number of gender-aware researchers who realize the importance and wide-ranging benefits of integrating gender in agricultural research. I hope that ACIAR Vietnam will continue with this big movement to more progress in gender. The most memorable experience for me in this project was inviting ethnic minority farmers and students to participate in the regional gender workshop. I wanted all participants to listen to the powerful voices of the marginalized people and respect the farmers as our research partners, which begins to empower them. I had as many challenges as great experiences in this project, which I will share in the next opportunity. I appreciate my ACIAR research partners, the farmers, and the ACIAR managers who always encouraged and supported our team.

Could you share with us about your hobbies and your most favourite leisure activities in Vietnam when you do not have to work?

I like gardening. In my apartment, I have more than 20 pots of plants, each labelled with a male or female name. Every morning I spend more than one hour checking them over, cleaning their leaves and watering them. Plants are very strong and highly adaptable to different environments, and that gives me a lot of power and energy. I also like cooking, which is an art as well as science, and for me is more than a hobby. I work as a freelance chef specializing in potato and sweet potato, and last year, I made six cooking videos, two of which were in Vietnamese. This year, I would like to introduce more dishes to Vietnamese people, as well as to people across the world.
Interview with a farmer

Mrs Vo Thi Thao is a beneficiary of the Project on “Improving the sustainability of rice-shrimp farming systems in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam” (SMCN/2010/083). The project aims at increasing yields and profitability of rice-shrimp production systems, particularly of new designs, in the Mekong Delta and ensuring these systems can adapt to environmental change and its effect on pond soil and water quality. For a particular case of Mrs Thao, we can explore how the project has changed her shrimp and rice crops, access to and usage of technologies, farming approach, and especially income creation diversified in her family.

Thank you chi Thao for agreeing to share with ACIAR your story. Could you tell us briefly about your project’s key activities, and your role in this rice-shrimp project?

My husband and I joined this project since 2016. I carry out better farming practices both for rice and shrimp crops instructed by project technical staffs and also join in collecting samples and recording data for research team. I have learned and carried out technologies that I did not know and do before. For example for shrimp crop, I have done suitable sludge removal, disinfection by using lime, nursing postlarvae before releasing into ditch and platform, water and health checking and measure application, harvesting shrimp at suitable time and size. For rice crop, I have done the selection of suitable rice crop season and appropriate saline washing and fertilizer for rice. Moreover, I have learned and done data recording for research team and for tracing myself. I have done this because I would like to share and hopefully to replace my husband in doing farming and managing the farm.

What change is this project bringing to the local people? And to you?

I now partly replace my husband in doing rice and shrimp farming and managing farms. I can apply suitable measures for rice and shrimp farming and know how to save time for my family. Due to my ability to manage the farms, my husband spends more time for other activities for earning more money and more time take caring children, relatives and for social activities. As a result, the income from rice-shrimp farming and others has increased annually. Besides this, we can share our knowledge and experiences of farming practices and management to neighbour farmers. Moreover, we often receive visits from different groups of people.

What connection with ACIAR in particular, and with Australia in general, have you made when working in this project?

Through joining project, I learn that ACIAR is an organisation to support budget and Australian researchers for doing research. Especially, this organisation of Australia supports with aims to reduce poverty and contribute to stable income in Vietnam. I do not know much about Australia. However, through working with Australian researchers I find out that they are very nice and friendly.
New Research Program Managers for Vietnam

ACIAR research management team from Canberra provides technical guidance and support for ACIAR funded projects worldwide. There have been significant changes in the research program structure and managers recently.

We sincerely thank outgoing Research Program Managers (RPMs): Dr Rodd Dyer (AGB), Dr Chris Barlow (FIS), Dr Tony Bartlett (FST), Dr Werner Stur (LS), and Dr Robert Edis (SLaM) for their leadership, professionalism, passion for agricultural research, and their love dedicated to Vietnam as a country and to development of the agricultural sector. Some of them will move to mentor’s positions to support incoming RPMs while the other pursue their own plans. We wish them all the best for their future endeavours.

Among ten RPMs and/or Associate RPMs of the eight research programs, who will manage 37 current projects in Vietnam, almost all of them are new to the country. In addition, the Chief Scientist, who manages the research portfolio as well as all RPMs, is a new position in ACIAR. We, therefore, would like to introduce them here. We look forward to working closely with them in the near future.

Chief Scientist  | Dr Daniel Walker

Dan joined ACIAR in November 2017 to take up the new Chief Scientist role. The Chief Scientist oversees the strategic science focus of ACIAR’s portfolio and our impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation work and provides leadership for Research Program Managers. Dan joined ACIAR after 23 years at CSIRO, Australia’s national science agency, where he was most recently Research Director for ‘Agriculture and Global Change’ in CSIRO Agriculture and Food and prior to that Chief of CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences. He has a BSc (Hons) in Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economy from the University of Edinburgh University and a PhD from the University of Wales. Before coming to Australia he conducted research in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand funded by the then UK Overseas Development Agency.

Agribusiness (AGB)  | Mr Howard Hall  | Research Program Manager

Howard has worked for many years as an agribusiness consultant in North and South-east Asia, PNG and the Pacific, across tropical and temperate horticulture, intensive and extensive meat and seafood industries, grains, pulses and field crops, food packing and processing. He has also worked as a senior manager in corporate agribusiness in the agricultural inputs sector and in food manufacturing and distribution. Howard has a Bachelor of Applied Science (Rural Technology) from UQ and a Graduate Diploma of Business Studies from UNE. Howard starts working with ACIAR from 25 February 2019.

Crops (CROP)  | Dr Eric Huttner  | Research Program Manager

Eric graduated from France’s leading agricultural engineering school, Institut National Agronomique. Started his career in plant molecular genetics, Eric has worked in a range of public and private research institutions, and managed public-private research initiatives throughout his career. Eric has been an International leading genetic scientist and coordinator. He has started at ACIAR as an RPM since August 2012.
Crops (CROP) | Dr Sarina Macfadyen | Associate Research Program Manager

Sarina has recently joined ACIAR based in Canberra on a secondment from CSIRO for two years. Her technical background is in invertebrate pest management across a diversity of crops. Her new role in ACIAR will include some strategic thinking around farming systems analysis to understand when this approach might be useful in current and future ACIAR projects. She has recently become engaged in the development of a new project that aims to provide new management strategies for cassava mosaic disease (CMD) which is causing significant problems for cassava producers in Vietnam and starch processors across the region.

Forestry (FST) | Dr Nora Devoe | Research Program Manager

Before joining ACIAR, Nora worked in commercial hardwood production in Victoria and Western Australia, New Zealand and several tropical countries. She has also been employed in public policy, academia, and forestry for rural development. Nora has a long-standing interest in the social dimensions of forestry, with prior research in community forestry and sustainability including social, economic, and ecological aspects. Nora holds a PhD in silviculture and Master of Forest Science in forest ecology from Yale University and the BSc in environmental science from Antioch University. Nora started the RPM role in 2018.

Fisheries (FIS) | Dr Ann Fleming | Research Program Manager

Ann has a PhD in Aquaculture from the University of Melbourne, a BSc (Hons) from Monash and a Graduate Certificate in Public Sector Management from Flinders University. She is currently undertaking a Masters of International Development at RMIT. Ann holds an extensive knowledge about Indigenous fisheries policy and management in the Northern Territory (Australia), research capacity development for mariculture enterprises, and research for development of seafood industries in Australia. Ann has managed ACIAR’s fisheries program since 2017.

Livestock Systems (LS) | Dr Anna Okello | Research Program Manager

Since graduating as a veterinarian from the University of Melbourne in 2002, Anna has spent the majority of her career working in international livestock development and public health programmes in Africa and Southeast Asia. After completing her PhD in 2012, she has worked in various project management and technical advisory roles for international NGOs, the University of Edinburgh, the Australian Animal Health Laboratory, the World Health Organization and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. Anna has had experience with ACIAR projects in South East region from 2012 and joined the Canberra office in 2017.
Social Sciences (SSs) | Dr Jayne Curnow | Research Program Manager

Jayne is an anthropologist with extensive leadership experience in international aid and research for development spanning the water, agriculture, natural resource management, legal, economic, and health sectors. Jayne chairs the Gender Committee and led the development of ACIAR Gender Equity Strategy and Policy across the agency and its research programs. Jayne is fluent in Bahasa Indonesian and Malay. The Social Sciences portfolio covers a wide range of research themes, including livelihoods, agricultural extension, gendered social relations, women’s empowerment, climate adaptation, ecosystems and natural resource management.

Soil & Land Management (SLaM) | Dr James Quilty | Research Program Manager

James joins ACIAR from his role as Platform Leader, Integrative Research Support Platform with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. James specialises in agronomy and soil science, and holds a PhD from the University of Sydney. Prior to discovering a passion for international agricultural research for food security and poverty reduction in low- and middle-income countries, James worked in the IT sector for ten years as a software engineer. He brings a wealth of international experience to the role - in research and in the organisation of research infrastructure, equipment, data, systems and processes. James joins ACIAR on 4 March 2019.

Water and Climate Change (WAC) | Dr Robyn Johnston | Research Program Manager

Before joining ACIAR in 2017, Robyn was a Principal Researcher with the International Water Management Institute, including three years as IWMI Representative in Myanmar. She has previously worked with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and the Mekong River Commission; as Environment Advisor for AusAID; and with the Bureau of Rural Sciences and Geoscience Australia, working on science and policy of land and water management. She holds a BSc (Honours) from Australian National University; MSc (Geochemistry) from University of Leeds; and a PhD from the University of New England.

Water and Climate Change (WAC) | Mr Lee Nelson | Associate Research Program Manager

Before joining ACIAR in December 2018, Lee worked for fifteen years in policy and research positions on climate change and natural resource management with the Australian Government Department Agriculture and Water Resources and the Department of Environment and Energy. Lee has also held positions with private industry in the mining and chemicals sectors, as well as the not-for-profit sectors in environment and law. Lee is passionate about the environment and flying ultralights. He holds degrees in Science, Law, and Business.
ACIAR Vietnam team updates

ACIAR Vietnam welcomes our new team members: Mr Tran Nam Anh, Assistant Country Manager; Mr Nguyen Duc Hiep, Intern and Ms Nguyen Mai, Communications Consultant.

Tran Nam Anh

Mr Tran Nam Anh is a professional communicator with an extensive working experience and deep passion in development communication.

Starting his career in 1996, he worked for the Vietnam Television, then Vietnam Post and Telecommunications Corporation as a news reporter and editor until 2003. He then spent four years managing communication activities for the United Nations Volunteers Program in Vietnam.

He has spent the last over ten years working as a communications manager for the former AusAID team and the Strategic Communications Coordination team at the Australian Embassy in Hanoi.

Mr Tran Nam Anh holds a bachelor degree from the Vietnam National University and a master degree in media & communications from the University of Queensland, Australia.

Nguyen Duc Hiep

For a number of years ACIAR Vietnam has been hosting short-term interns at the country office, as part of the Australian Embassy’s internship program. Our interns are talented fresh-graduates or those at their last year study in the universities. ACIAR Vietnam’s most recent intern is Mr Nguyen Duc Hiep, who has just graduated from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam with a Bachelor degree in International Law.

Duc Hiep successfully applied for an internship with ACIAR after returning from a six-month transfer program at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Duc Hiep has demonstrated the will to learn about and support ACIAR’s activities in Vietnam. He has also expressed the desire to gain more administrative skill as well as broaden the professional network during the internship.

Hiep assisted ACIAR in organising its New Year gathering and book launch, as well as working on the translation and editorial of this Newsletter. Hiep’s internship with ACIAR Vietnam finishes on 1 March 2019.

Nguyen Mai

As a Communications Consultant at ACIAR Vietnam, Ms Nguyen Mai is responsible for the development and coordinating ACIAR Vietnam’s communications strategy, and supports ACIAR in Vietnam and its Headquarters in Canberra in the development and promotion of communications products.

Mai is experienced with strategic communications planning, producing communication products, publications, knowledge dissemination and social media. Before joining ACIAR, she supported the organisation of the ‘Taste of Australia’ event of the Australian Embassy; coordinated public relations and outreach activities for the Vietnam Education Foundation. She is experienced in partnership management and business development for international businesses, and has supported a number of development projects to help Vietnam achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Ms Nguyen Mai obtained the advanced Master in Globalisation and Development in Belgium with the thesis research on value chains in agriculture.
Stir-fried H’mong Mustard Greens with Pork

**Ingredients**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500 g</td>
<td>H’mong mustard greens</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 g</td>
<td>pork belly</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ tbsp</td>
<td>lard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 cloves</td>
<td>garlic</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tsp</td>
<td>sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tbsp</td>
<td>soy sauce</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ tbsp</td>
<td>oyster sauce</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pepper</td>
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**Method**

Slice the pork belly into bite-sized pieces, heat the cooking pan over medium-high temperature and stir fry the pork belly until the fat from the pork melts off and the meat turns into caramelised color.

Add minced garlic into the pan to stir-fry with pork belly until the garlic release its aroma and turns into golden color.

Chop fresh mustard greens into five-centimetre pieces then add into the pan and stir-fry over the maximum heat until greens are tender. Season to taste with pepper, soy sauce and oyster sauce before removing from the pan. Ready to plate and serve.

**Fast Facts**

- H’mong mustard greens are the special indigenous vegetables of H’mong people in North West Vietnam. Ideal climate conditions have helped farmers produce high-quality and safe-to-eat H’mong mustard greens.
- H’mong mustard greens have a distinct taste which is a bit bitter when tasted at first but a sweet flavour soon follows. H’mong mustard greens are considerably rich in vitamins B and C as well as beta-carotene.
- Researchers consider H’mong mustard greens similar to the quality of Australia’s rocket plant (Eruca sativa).
- H’mong mustard greens are in peak season from September to February.
The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is part of Australia's international development cooperation program. Its mission is to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems for the benefit of developing countries and Australia. ACIAR commissions collaborative research between Australian and developing-country researchers in areas where Australia has special research competence. ACIAR also administers Australia’s contribution to the international agricultural research centres.

ACIAR Vietnam is one of the ten country/regional offices and we have been active in Vietnam for 26 years (1993-2019).

Contact Us:
ACIAR Vietnam Office
Tel: +84-24 3774 0265
Email: aciarvietnam@aciar.gov.au

Australian Embassy
8 Dao Tan Street
Ba Dinh District
Hanoi, Vietnam.