News
ACIAR Vietnam future program (p.3)
ACIAR CEO’s visit to Vietnam (p.5)
North West Vietnam Research Symposium: ‘Mountains of opportunity’ (p.7)
Partnership for improved food security policy in Vietnam (p.8)
Honouring Dr Ha Huy Thinh’s career: looking back and looking ahead (p.9)
ACIAR congratulates CIAT on its 50th anniversary (p.10)

Project updates
Intensification of beef cattle production in upland cropping systems of North West Vietnam (p.11)
Improving livelihoods in Myanmar and Vietnam through vegetable value chains (p.12)
Market-based Agroforestry and Forest rehabilitation options for North West Vietnam (p.13)
Partnerships and teamwork highlighted as keys to project progress (p.14)
Policy dialogue 2017 on improving policies for tree plantation in Vietnam (p.15)

Capacity building
John Dillon Fellowship 2017 (p.16)
Training on communications for ACIAR country offices (p.17)

Humans of ACIAR
Opportunity in the backyard garden (p.18)

Farm to fork
Beef rolls with H’mong mustard greens (p.20)
ACIAR will hold a research symposium on opportunities for North-West development.
See more on page 7.

Beef cattle will remain a focus of ACIAR livestock research.
See two projects on beef cattle in North West and South Central in ‘Project updates’ section.
ACIAR has worked in Vietnam for 24 years. During this time, we have completed 170 projects across the country, invested around A$ 4-5 million per year, and worked with most of the agricultural research institutions in Vietnam. ACIAR is proud to have contributed to building capacity in agricultural research and increasing food security and incomes for farmers.

ACIAR’s future program is changing its focus. The ACIAR team and research and development partners from Australia and Vietnam met between August 2016 and March 2017, with a final conference held in Hanoi on 6 March, to discuss the collaborative research strategy for agricultural development over the next decade.

The final consultation workshop was co-chaired by Dr Le Quoc Doanh, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and H.E. Mr Craig Chittick OAM, Australian Ambassador to Vietnam.

The participants included senior officials from ACIAR and the Australian Embassy, the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and representatives from research institutes, universities, private sector and NGOs. At the workshop, the participants discussed the strategy draft.

Both sides agreed that key points of the strategy were:

Research themes | Along with research for higher value of forestry and aquaculture products, research themes were discussed to address key challenges for agricultural development, including food safety, climate change, soil fertility and crop efficiency, and market engagement. Specific targets for future research were identified and rated. They are:

Theme 1: Food safety

(i). Biocontrol methods for pests and diseases in horticulture and crops.

(ii) Assessing food safety risks and developing clean and safe meat supply chains.

(iii) Improved chemical use in vegetable production and supply chain management.

(iv) Improved biosecurity, including diagnosis and management of animal diseases, particularly zoonoses, and antimicrobial resistance.

(v) Analyses of policy interventions and possible regulatory reforms.

Theme 2: Climate change

(i) Breeding and selection for adaptation to biotic and abiotic stresses.

(ii) Policy and economic analysis of opportunities for alternative crops and production systems in areas subject to sea level rise and saline intrusion.

(iii) Development of ‘low carbon’ technologies and practices to reduce greenhouse gases, and maximise the effective exploitation of waste from crop and animal production, and aquaculture.

(iv) Analysis of the economics of land-use change and adoption of new varieties and management practices, as
well as of possible policy interventions.

(v) Filling animal feed gaps, particularly during winter in the Northern Highlands and the dry season in the Central Highlands and South.

Theme 3: Soil fertility and crop efficiency

(i) Developing better skills to analyse nutrient deficiencies in fruit and vegetables and developing appropriate solutions.

(ii) Improving the quality and value of temperate fruits.

(iii) Improving the quality and quantity of safe vegetables.

(iv) Improving the sustainability of cropping systems on sloping land.

(v) Improving the resource use efficiency and profitability of livestock production in crop–livestock systems in mountainous areas.

(vi) Improving plant nutrition and crop management for non-rice crops in the Mekong delta.

(vii) Diagnosing and managing soil-borne diseases, and reducing chemical inputs in intensive cropping systems in the Central highlands.

(viii) Adding value to crop and animal production waste including use as fertilisers and soil conditioners.

(ix) Developing commercial medicinal plants and non-timber forest products.

(x) Improving the availability and sustainability of groundwater resources in intensive production areas.

Theme 4: Market engagement

(i) The role and form of producer organisations, including improving their access to technology, finance, inputs and markets.

(ii) Improvement in agrifood value chains through understanding efficiencies and constraints to improving value and policies that provide incentives for increasing investment.

(iii) Policies to support agricultural restructuring, analysis of factor markets (such as land, water and labour).

(iv) Regional market analysis for certain commodities where Vietnam has a particular opportunity, commencing with beef and cassava.

Theme 5: Forestry

(i) Sustainable development of plantations, forest health and value-added processing.

(ii) Sustainable and economic rehabilitation and management of native forests.

(iii) Sustainable development of non-timber forest products.

(iv) Forest product marketing, to improve the utilisation for high value products.

(v) Sustainable agroforestry systems on sloping lands.

Theme 6: Aquaculture

(i) Developing genetic and breeding technologies, with potential target systems being shrimp, lobster, marine fish, bivalves, abalone, sea cucumbers and seaweeds.

(ii) Developing production technologies for sustainable production of seafood at small scale and low cost.

(iii) Co-management of waterways and water rights.

(iv) Building better capacity for disease diagnostics and response.

(v) Monitoring, assessing and improving environment management in areas of intensive aquaculture production.

(vi) Developing novel and cost effective feeds for aquaculture.

Geographical focus | The research themes are best focused in three regions: the Mekong Delta, the Central Highlands, and the North West. While the Mekong Delta and the Central Highlands have capacity for agricultural products exporting, they face climate change challenges. The Central Highlands and the North West share challenges for development, including sloping land conservation, generating better livelihoods for ethnic minorities, and economically empowering women.

Partnership and funding | The future program looks to a more equal partnership, based on mutual interest and co-contribution. Although ACIAR funding will remain about the same, the workshop participants discussed how Vietnam could financially contribute, such as through co-funding or parallel funding. Jointly funded projects could increase alignment between ACIAR-funded and Vietnamese Government-funded projects, increase the number of projects in the collaboration, and increase the ownership of projects by Vietnamese partners. Future partnership will also encourage the engagement and stronger involvement of the agriculture alumni network (including ACIAR John Allwright and John Dillon alumni), the private sector, NGOs, development partners and other service providers for more practical research outcomes.

Details of the strategy will be shared on <aciar.gov.au> and <vietnam.embassy.au> in the near future.
ACIAR CEO Prof Andrew Campbell visited Hanoi on 3-4 April 2017 to meet with partners in Vietnam and attend the 50th anniversary of the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), a long-term ACIAR partner.

During his visit, Prof Campbell met other key ACIAR partners from ministries, agricultural organizations and institutions, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), the Institute for Policy and Strategies for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD), the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS), and the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences (CATAS).


Prof Campbell and the partners appreciated that the research programs had fostered co-operation and contributed to growing Vietnam’s economy, protecting the environment, and building capacity.

Vietnam has also benefited from ACIAR’s support for training courses and fellowship programs which aim to develop skills and strengthen the network for agricultural research, management, and policy development.

On the afternoon of 3 April, Prof Campbell joined the Australian delegation led by the Hon Keith Pitt MP, Assistant Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment. He met Dr Le Quoc Doanh, Vice Minister of MARD, to discuss the direction for Australia and Vietnam’s agricultural research partnership over the next 10 years. Vietnam will continue to be a priority for ACIAR’s program.

In his keynote speech at CIAT’s 50th anniversary, Prof Campbell emphasised: “The issues that we are tackling with our research will literally determine the future of our species – homo sapiens. If we cannot work out how to grow more food and benefit and to share it more effectively using less land, less water, less energy, less nutrients and wisely stop polluting the atmosphere, then humanity has a problematic future. I wish you well for the next 50 years so we can enjoy very productive relationships in this country and this region.”

After the anniversary celebration, Prof Campbell joined ACIAR
Prof Andrew Campbell joined the Australian delegation in the meeting with MARD of Vietnam. Photo: ACIAR Vietnam

Vietnam office staff at the CIAT50 Expo under the theme of ‘From soil to plate: an agri-market place for eco-efficient ideas, technologies…and foods!’.

Prof Campbell visited the Vietnam Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS), one of ACIAR’s first partners in the country, on the afternoon of 4 April. He met with leaders of the Academy, visited wood processing facilities and breeding labs, and met with Dr Nghiem Quynh Chi, a John Allwright Fellowship alumna. VAFS is participating in five active projects under the Forestry program, mostly focusing on silviculture, agroforestry, and plantation forest policy. The visit provided an insight into the potential economic benefits that come from trees in agricultural systems and key technology inputs for advanced tree breeding for developing successful plantations in Vietnam.

Prof Campbell ended his visit by meeting ten alumni from ACIAR’s John Allwright (JAF) and John Dillon Fellowships (JDF) for the first time at a cozy dinner in Hanoi. The fellows got to know each other and Prof Campbell, and talk about their expertise, organisations and work related to ACIAR’s program and their passion for agricultural development.

Prof Campbell proudly said: “ACIAR scholarship recipients will be one of our best legacies in Vietnam.”
ACIAR will hold a research symposium in Hanoi on 23–24 November 2017. The symposium will showcase key learnings, insights and implications from twenty ACIAR research projects in North West Vietnam. It will inform government, donors, research organizations and agribusiness about the opportunities for inclusive agricultural-led economic growth in mountainous regions.

The symposium program
The symposium’s theme is ‘Mountains of Opportunity’, and will include topics in four theme areas: (1) Regional markets and trade, (2) Sustainable farming systems, (3) Safe food value chains, and (4) Inclusive and prosperous communities.

Researchers will present key results, insights and implications from ACIAR-supported projects across the four theme areas. A panel discussion involving different stakeholders will be coordinated for each theme area to create a platform for debates and deeper understanding of the value chains, markets, systems and communities. Fifty posters will also present research findings. All presentations and poster abstracts will be used to publish a book on the North West research program.

Young and dynamic researchers in ACIAR projects will be challenged in a 3-minute creative presentation competition to consolidate and deliver their research ideas to a non-specialist audience in an engaging way.

Technical knowledge exchange and networking activities will be balanced for an effective and pleasant symposium.

Background
North West Vietnam is a region with ‘Mountains of Opportunity’. Opportunities exist for developing agricultural markets capable of improving poor men and women’s livelihoods, producing sought-after safe, high quality food and agricultural products for consumers, and significantly benefiting Vietnam’s economy.

The North West is rich in social-cultural diversity, unique natural attributes, and enormous agro-ecological potential. It is within reach of some of the largest and fastest growing global, regional and local agri-food markets – but the region is also home to persistent and high rates of poverty and food insecurity, particularly amongst the majority ethnic minority communities. Widespread degradation of the natural land and water resources also threaten natural landscapes and future agricultural potential.

Research is important in understanding and overcoming technical constraints to agriculture to secure the future of these mountainous areas and ensure that smallholders and the poor can participate and benefit. Over the last 25 years, ACIAR has supported agricultural research partnerships with local Vietnamese institutions in crop nutrition and soil management, livestock production, forestry and agroforestry, agribusiness and policy. Over the last ten years, much of this work has been focused in the North West mountainous region.

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A farmer of H’mong ethnic minority in Bac Ha, Lao Cai province. Photo: ACIAR Vietnam.
North West landscape. Photo: ICRAF Vietnam.
Vietnam has made incredible progress in improving food security over the last 30 years. Once suffering severe food shortages, the country has become one of the world’s leading rice exporters. Vietnam now produces more than enough calories for the whole population at a national level – but significant food security issues remain. Malnutrition, anaemia and food safety are persistent issues, especially among pregnant women, children under five years of age, and people in disadvantaged regions.

In 2016, ACIAR published a monograph called ‘Vietnam Food Security Policy Review’, which comprises papers by a research team spanning government and academia in Vietnam and Australia. The monograph provides valuable insights into Vietnam’s agricultural development through time, the policy development process, current food security policies, and capacity for evidence-based food security analysis. It evaluates current food security policies, and makes recommendations. The monograph was launched by the Australian Ambassador H.E. Mr Craig Chittick OAM and Vice Minister Le Quoc Doanh from Vietnam’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) at a dinner reception the Ambassador hosted at his residence on 6 March 2017. The function followed a consultation conference on strategy for agricultural co-operation between Australia and Vietnam. One of the book’s authors, Ms Vu Hoang Yen from the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), attended the event, along with senior Australian staff from the Embassy and ACIAR, and Vietnamese partners from ministries, research institutions, and the private sector.

At the launch, the Ambassador said: “ACIAR’s work is not just about research for improved on-farm practices, but also about policy research, market research, to help strengthen the economy and prosperity of Vietnam.”

The monograph is a compilation of papers prepared under ACIAR’s project ‘Scoping study for agricultural development policy review for Vietnam food security’ (ADP/2015/001). Ten papers are presented in the book and are the result of extensive literature review, discussions among project participants and other key informants in Vietnam, Indonesia and Australia, and semi-structured surveys of key stakeholders involved in policy development or affected by policy reform in Vietnam. They include government employees, researchers, farmers and business owners/operators.

Ms Yen said: “This monograph is the result of teamwork and partnership. We thank ACIAR for supporting the research and the publication.”

The project, led by Dr Liz Peterson from the University of Western Australia (UWA), involved researchers from Vietnam’s MPI and the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD), and the Australian National University (ANU).

The contributors to this monograph hope the book will generate discussion and rigorous research, contributing to improved food security policy, policy analysis, and to the ultimate goal of eliminating food insecurity in Vietnam.

Dr Ha Huy Thinh, one of the fathers of acacia plantations in Vietnam, retired this year from a 35-year career researching forestry tree breeding.

A warm farewell ceremony was held at the Institute of Forest Tree Improvement and Biotechnology (IFTIB) to pay tribute to Dr Thinh on 24 March 2017. Many of his Vietnamese and Australian colleagues, friends, students and family were at the ceremony to congratulate and thank the dedicated scientist for his accomplishment. Deputy Australian Ambassador Jeff Roach, ACIAR Research Program Managers and Vietnam office staff attended the ceremony on behalf of the Australian Government and ACIAR.

Dr Thinh returned from the Technische Universität Dresden in 1981 and started working at the Forest Sciences Institute of Vietnam (FSIV) in 1983 as a trainee, then as a young researcher. He succeeded Prof Le Dinh Kha as Director of Research Centre for Forest Tree Improvement (RCFTI) – now known as the Institute of Forest Tree Improvement and Biotechnology (IFTIB) – from 2000 to 2017. Looking back at his directorship, Dr Thinh can confidently say that he dedicated himself to his responsibilities.

In 1992, Dr Thinh worked with ACIAR to co-ordinate its earliest project in Vietnam. Since then, he has participated in 10 projects funded by the Australian Government, mainly through the ACIAR program and some through other aid development programs such as the Forest Tree Improvement Project (FORTIP), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), and the Collaboration in Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) Program.

At the farewell ceremony, the Deputy Ambassador congratulated and thanked Dr Thinh for his career achievements and his significant contribution to Australia and Vietnam’s collaboration in forestry research. Over the 25 years Dr Thinh worked with Australian and Vietnamese researchers, he built a network of friends and colleagues in both countries. Scientist friends from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the University of Tasmania, and other academic organisations showed their respect to Dr Thinh in their farewell speeches.

Dr Chris Harwood, a former senior scientist from CSIRO and a colleague of Dr Thinh’s for the last 25 years, had collaborated with IFTIB and Dr Thinh in seven ACIAR-funded forestry projects. He said that Dr Thinh had significantly contributed to integrated plantation management when working with international scientists. Dr Thinh viewed plantation forests as ecological systems where integrating tree improvement and forest health with sustainable site management, and engaging with forest growers and wood users, is necessary to secure a sustainable plantation forest industry for Vietnam.

The most successful example of plantation forests is the Australian acacias that were introduced into Vietnam for testing in the early 1960s. Some of the varieties now have the greatest potential for commercial production in the whole country. An estimated 1.2 million hectares of acacia were planted in 2012, of which smallholders owned about 70%. The industry now generates US$4.3 billion per year from pulpwod sales. Dr Thinh was one of the first scientists after Prof Kha to be credited for this achievement.

One of Dr Thinh’s greatest legacies is to have improved the institute’s staff’s research capacity as he passed on his knowledge and nurtured the next generation’s passion for the forest and forestry sector. He hoped that researchers who received Australian scholarships would return and become lead researchers and research managers. As Stephen Midgley, former Program Manager of CSIRO’s ‘Tree Improvement and Genetic Resources Program’ (1994–2002) and a close friend of Dr Thinh’s, said: “Dr Thinh’s leadership and commitment to science, service to country and team development can be considered as models for others to follow.”

Dr Thinh can confidently step down as a leader of this research area in the knowledge that the future is in the safe hands of strong, well-trained researchers following his example.

As his colleagues and friends, we honour him for his outstanding leadership and public service to Vietnam’s forestry sector. We sincerely thank him for his enduring support and warm and generous friendship. We wish him and his family health and happiness. We have no doubt that our friendship could never end.

For further information, please contact
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ACIAR congratulates CIAT on its 50th Anniversary

The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), a long-term ACIAR partner, celebrated its 50th anniversary in April.

ACIAR’s CEO Prof Andrew Campbell and the Vietnam Country Manager Nguyen Thi Thanh An attended a ceremony and an agri-food expo to mark the event. CIAT’s partners from all around the world also participated in the event.

At the anniversary reception on 3 April, Prof Campbell congratulated CIAT on its achievements and contribution to agriculture in Asia. He highlighted the long-term partnership between CIAT and ACIAR and their commitment to economic growth, reducing poverty, and increasing living standards in developing countries.

ACIAR and CIAT have worked together on crops, livestock, natural resources, forestry and socio-economics and policy. The collaborative projects were designed to produce specific research outputs and translate them into development outcomes such as improved food security, better nutrition, improved health, and increased prosperity.

Over the past 10 years, CIAT has contributed to 13 Australia-funded projects, mainly through ACIAR’s program, focusing on South East Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar) and some parts of Africa.

The ACIAR team joined hundreds of researchers, development practitioners, and donors at the CIAT50 Expo on 4 April, where a booth displayed ACIAR’s products and information from projects and programs. Prof Campbell and ACIAR staff were introduced to agricultural projects that have yielded fruitful results in Vietnam. They also attended panel discussions on ‘Feed and forage security for livestock intensification in Vietnam’ and ‘Building research partnerships with the private sector’.

ACIAR project AGB/2012/059 ‘Towards more profitable and sustainable vegetable farming systems in North-West Vietnam’ displayed a stall of its fresh and safe produce. CIAT contributed to this multi-partner project to enhance the profitability and sustainability of smallholder vegetable farmers (particularly women and ethnic minorities) in North West Vietnam through improved market engagement and integrated resource and disease management.

ACIAR hopes the collaboration with CIAT will continue in the future to contribute to agricultural research and development in the region.
Intensification of beef cattle production in upland cropping systems of North West Vietnam

The project LPS/2015/037 ‘Intensification of beef cattle production in upland cropping systems in Northwest Vietnam’ is funded by the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) and the Government of Vietnam.

This project aims to improve smallholder cattle producers’ income through intensifying beef cattle production and increasing market linkages in mountainous crop-livestock systems in the North West of Vietnam.

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) is the lead Australian organisation, partnering with the National Institute of Animal Science (NIAS), and the Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA). The project established research partnerships with the Dien Bien Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry (TUAF), Tay Bac University (TBU) and the Centre for Agrarian Systems Research and Development (CASRAD). Other partners include the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) and the University of Queensland (UQ), to complete the skills available at UTAS.

The project’s inception meeting was held in Dien Bien Phu on 9 March 2017. 50 participants attended, including the research project team, representatives of Dien Bien DARD, and researchers from five other ACIAR projects also working in the North West on maize, cassava, vegetables, agro-forestry and safe pork.

The meeting opened with a presentation by Mr Bui Minh Hai, Vice Director of Dien Bien DARD, on crop-livestock production systems in Dien Bien and the results of the previous project (LPS/2008/049). Prof Vu Chi Cuong (the new project leader from Vietnam) welcomed the participants; Dr Stephen Ives (the new project leader from Australia) introduced the new beef project; and all invited projects gave presentations on their own projects and outcomes and potential links with this new beef project.

During the afternoon, members of the project team worked in four objective-groups on implementation plans. They went on field visits the following day. Specific objectives are to:

- Understand the transition from extensive to more intensive beef cattle production
- Develop production technologies and practices that support more intensive, integrated crop-livestock systems
- Improve farmers’ linkages to urban beef markets
- Build the capacity of beef value chain stakeholders to support and out-scale sustainable cattle production systems in the North West highlands.

The outcomes and results of the project outputs will be:

- Profitable cattle feeding systems, integrated with cropping and improved environmental sustainability as farmers transfer to more intensive, market-oriented beef production systems
- Improved gender equity; reallocation of farming tasks and time available for non-farming activities for women and education for children
- Farmers and traders will have better access to markets and understanding of market demand and opportunities; promote market-oriented production and cash income from beef cattle production
- Improved information exchange between stakeholders leading to a resilient beef value chain that innovates to meet changing market demands and conditions
- Increased capacity of local DARD and government that maintains a regulatory and political environment to improve markets and alleviate poverty
- Scaling out of sustainable livestock based farming systems in the mountainous region of North West Vietnam.

By Le Thi Thanh Huyen¹, Vu Chi Cuong¹, Stephen Ives²

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The ACIAR-funded project ‘Improving livelihoods in Myanmar and Vietnam through vegetable value chains’ (ABG/2014/035) continues project ‘Improved market engagement for counter-seasonal vegetable producers in North West Vietnam’ (AGB/2009/053) which has operated in the area since 2009. The new project has two separate components for Vietnam and Myanmar.

The new Vietnamese component aims to take the safe vegetable supply chain model that the first project developed and expand it to include more farmers and to ensure sustainability without funds or intervention from ACIAR. The project is expanding from four farmer groups to at least ten in the first year and will document a scalable farmer group model by the end of the fourth year of implementation. The project will also protect and improve the integrity of the ‘Moc Chau vegetable’ trademark in Hanoi, which is crucial to the high income that farmers receive for their produce.

The primary objective in Myanmar is to understand the demand for high-quality safe vegetables, the retail (and hotel/restaurant service) environment, and the supply chains in the country. The project will adapt the learnings from Vietnam to suit Myanmar and establish farmer groups.

In the first year of implementation, activities in Vietnam will continue with the original four farmer groups (Van Ho, Tu Nhien, Ta Niet, and An Thai villages). At least six new groups will be added. The project will study the vegetable industry, conduct agronomic and post-harvest trials and a baseline economic study, and train farmers.

The Vietnamese component of the new project was launched at an inception meeting at the Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (NOMAFSI) in Hanoi on 14 March 2017. Dr Pham Thi Sen, project co-ordinator (NOMAFSI), opened the meeting and presented some key results from the first phase. Dr Gordon Rogers, project leader (AHR), introduced the new phase, including the Myanmar component. Dr Rodd Dyer, ACIAR’s Research Program Manager for Agribusiness, outlined the importance of the project for Vietnam and explained the linkages to Myanmar.

The leader of a similar United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) project in Moc Chau and Van Ho districts also gave a presentation at the meeting. FAO’s project ended in May 2017 and will be followed by another project working on safe vegetables in the same area. FAO’s project agreed that the new ACIAR and FAO projects should collaborate.

Representatives from the Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development from Moc Chau, Van Ho districts and Son La province discussed the importance of the new project, which they strongly support.

Other project partners including Dr Isabelle Vagneron (the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development – CIRAD), Dr Oleg Nicetic (University of Queensland), and representatives from Centre for Agrarian Systems Research and Development (CASRAD), Fresh Studio and NOMAFSI also attended the meeting.

For further information, please contact Dr Gordon Rogers <gordon@ahr.com.au>.

Improving livelihoods in Myanmar and Vietnam through vegetable value chains

By Liam Southam-Rogers, Applied Horticultural Research (AHR)
The four-year ACIAR project ‘Developing and promoting market-based agroforestry and forest rehabilitation options for North West Viet Nam’ (FST/2016/152) was launched in Dien Bien Phu city on 22 March 2017 by the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF Vietnam).

The new project will develop and promote market-based agroforestry options to improve livelihoods and enhance forest and landscape management in three provinces in North West.

It is an adjacent project following project ‘Agroforestry for livelihoods of smallholder farmers in north-western of Viet Nam’ (FST/2010/034) funded by ACIAR and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) under the ‘Forest Trees & Agroforests’ program.

Almost 55 participants attended the inception meeting, including ACIAR representatives; leaders and officials of Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs) from Son La, Yen Bai, and Dien Bien provinces; experts, researchers and lecturers from institutes and universities, including ICRAF, the Vietnam Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS), the Soils and Fertilizers Research Institute (SFRI), the Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (NOMAFSI), Tay Bac University (TBU), and Southern Cross University (SCU); and village leaders and extension workers.

The project aims to:

- Evaluate of the performance of agroforestry options and timber tree species
- Scale up agroforestry
- Co-develop locally appropriate forest rehabilitation options
- Integrate tree-based landscape planning
- Develop project staff’s capacity

In this phase, the project will scale up agroforestry and rehabilitate forests at Van Ho (Son La province), Na Noi (Dien Bien province) and Thuong Bang La (Yen Bai province).

Partners demonstrated and then discussed all activities and methods. Throughout the workshop, Mr Tony Bartlett, ACIAR Research Program Manager for Forestry, highlighted the significance of partnership and expected ICRAF and partners to co-operate in all activities. ICRAF and partners have also committed and agreed on each partner’s accountability and function in every objective and activity supported by DARDs.

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Partnerships and teamwork highlighted as keys to project progress

ACIAR project LPS/2012/062 ‘Developing productive and profitable smallholder beef enterprise in Central Vietnam’ focuses on:

• Developing more efficient smallholder cow-calf and cattle growing systems through improved feeding and management;
• Developing stronger integration with markets for beef cattle producers who already have a production orientation; and
• Identifying and developing knowledge exchange and adoption pathways for expanding results within smallholder beef cattle enterprises.

Two of the most important results observed in the project thus far have been:

• Economic benefits to farm households directly involved in the project, thanks to improved feeding and management practices
• Strengthening research capacity of staff and students of Tay Nguyen University and the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry

A mid-term review (MTR) of the project was conducted in February 2017. The MTR team included Dr Werner Stür (ACIAR Livestock Production Systems Program Manager), Dr Vu Chi Cuong and Dr Le Thi Thanh Huyen (National Research Institute of Animal Science – NIAS), and ACIAR Vietnam staff. The team visited Dak Lak province to consult with stakeholders in Buon Ma Thuot, visited study sites in Ea Kar commune, and attended the annual project meeting held in Quy Nhon. Finally, the MTR team visited field sites in Tay Giang commune, Binh Dinh province, where cow-calf management strategies have been demonstrated and a cattle club formed.

Overall, the MTR team provided positive and constructive feedback to the project staff: “Excellent collaboration among project partners was evident, which is a credit to the project leaders and team members. There has been strong capacity building of staff and students involved in the project. Given that there is only one year left for achieving the intended project outputs and outcomes, there is a need to focus on completing key research activities, integrating the various research themes/objectives (production, value chain, adoption) and scaling out successful practices to more farmers around research sites.” (MTR Report).

The feedback made five key recommendations:

• Focus on completing biophysical research and preparing publications and extension packages that can be used to scale out in the project’s final year and in the future. Building district and communal extension workers’ capacity to deliver extension to and train farmers will be critical
• Ensure that the project’s three objectives are well integrated and contribute to each other
• Present the results of forage development to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for certification as an approved technology
• Investigate the role of cattle clubs after farmers know how to produce beef cattle
• Articulate the implications of the value chain research for smallholders.

The project team is finalising its extension and training strategy for the project’s final stage. It will complete and deliver extension materials through training courses for extension workers at district and commune level. These materials will include both theory and practical exercises for extension workers to work through with smallholders to ensure that smallholder farmers can apply them and that farmers and extension workers can exchange information.

Participants attended the annual meeting in Quy Nhon, 2017.

Photo: Project team.

By Rowan Smith¹ and Nguyen Xuan Ba²

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Policy dialogue 2017 on improving policies for tree plantation in Vietnam

By Rodney Keenan and Huynh Thu Ba, University of Melbourne

Introduction
The ACIAR-funded project ‘Improving policies for forest plantations to balance smallholder, industry and environmental needs in Lao PDR and Vietnam’ (ADP/2014/047) aims to provide policy options that achieve national goals for developing tree plantation industries in Vietnam and Lao PRD through improving linkages between commercial investment and smallholder production, and improving national researchers’ capacity in policy research and economic and social analyses.

Project progress
Extensive fieldwork research was carried out in 2016, including the analysis of (1) context, institutional processes, and organisational structures for plantation development; (2) social, human and financial resources and community livelihood strategies; (3) value chains for the plantation industry; and (4) wide effects of economy to plantation development. In 2017, the project will analyse data from approximately 100 interviews with policy makers and representatives from the industry, together with 300 household surveys and interviews, to generate concrete and evidence-based policy recommendations. The project prepared four background papers to discuss policy recommendations on (1) sustainable forest and smallholder management; (2) certification; (3) REDD+ and plantations; and (4) value chain partnerships.

2017 plantations policy dialogue
This project held its second Policy Dialogue in Hanoi on 24 March 2017. Australian Deputy Ambassador Jeff Roach and Prof Vo Dai Hai from the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences opened and chaired the Dialogue. Mr Roach highlighted ACIAR’s long-term commitment to and investment in Vietnam, with A$17.3 million invested in research on germplasm, silviculture, and technology inputs for advanced tree breeding for successful plantation development for woodchips and wood quality.

This policy forum is an annual activity of the project. In 2016, the Forum focused on promoting linkages, engaging stakeholders, and exploring challenges and barriers to plantations in Vietnam. In 2017, the Dialogue continued to facilitate dialogues and learning between researchers, private sector, government and non-state actors. Its key objectives are to:

- discuss policy options for tree plantations;
- scale up plantation timber production;
- motivate the timber industry and increase supply chain partnerships;
- promote certification of timber production; and
- improve sustainable forest management by smallholder growers.

At the 2017 Dialogue, the project presented its initial research findings, challenges and recommendations together with other key partners in plantations including the World Wide Fund (WWF), the KfW Development Bank (KfW) and the World Bank. Forty-three participants from government agencies, research institutions, NGOs, civil society and industries attended and contributed to the Dialogue. Results from the group discussions will provide a stronger foundation for the policy recommendations proposed in the four background papers. An integrated policy brief will be produced as a timely input in the formulation of the new Forest Law.

Policy analysis training
One of the project’s key objectives is to improve Vietnamese researchers’ capacity in economic and social analyses; evaluating policy; spatially assessing ecosystem goods and services; and planning and designing landscapes. Before the Policy Dialogue 2017, researchers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences, the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development and other ACIAR projects were trained how to analyse policy analysis. The training introduced different models and tools for policy analysis. The participants were given opportunities to reflect on their own styles and organisational styles of policy work, and how to apply these analysis tools at work.

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As a representative of Vietnam, I participated with others from nine countries in the John Dillon Fellowship Program funded by ACIAR from 10 February to 24 March 2017. I attended training sessions on research communication and leadership at the Melbourne Business School (Melbourne University), and went on field trips to the Northern Territory (Darwin), ACIAR House in Canberra, and Western Australia (Perth). Training programs at Melbourne University helped me understand myself better and identify a leadership type that fits my characteristics. This training provided me with valuable knowledge and skills in research and human resource management. These courses also delivered supporting research skills such as writing, presentation and publication.

A working week in Darwin in the Northern Territory was also exciting. I visited professors at Charles Darwin University and discussed forestry and fisheries. After that, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries organised trips to the Aquaculture Centre, the Forestry Centre and the Livestock Centre. My most interesting time in Darwin was meeting the Management Board of the Horticulture Farmer Association and the field trips to farms of Vietnamese and Cambodian horticultural farmers in the Association. My time working in Northern Territory has helped me understand more about its agriculture and inspired some ideas for further co-operation between Australia’s Northern Territory and Vietnam in the fields of forestry, horticulture and livestock (cattle).

Ten days working in Canberra raised my understanding of Australia’s agriculture, research system and policymaking. Through meeting ACIAR research program managers, I know more about ACIAR’s approach and research priorities for partners now and in the future. Attending the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES)’ Outlook Conference gave me a good chance to approach new Australian research ideas. The most impressive event in Canberra was the workshop with the CEO of ACIAR, the former CEO of ABARES and the former Minister of Trade. Their management and policymaking experience and expertise equipped me with priceless knowledge for my future career. In Canberra, I gave two presentations at the Australian National University about Vietnam’s agriculture and chances for further co-operation between Australia and Vietnam. Many professors, lecturers and students in this University participated in these two workshops.

I spent my final working week in Western Australia. In Perth, I had a productive working program with many professors about forestry, livestock, agriculture, biosecurity and clean renewable energy. I also organised a presentation about solutions to promote investment and trade between Western Australia and Vietnam, which was warmly welcomed.

The working program in Australia in the framework of John Dillon Fellowship gave me a valuable opportunity to improve my leadership and research capacity. This program also broadened my vision and my understanding of Australian agriculture and helped me identify new windows for further co-operation in agriculture between Australia and Vietnam. This important event was a highlight of my career and has widened my professional network with many international research agencies and organisations. Given the great benefits of the John Dillon Fellowship, I strongly wish that ACIAR will continue to support Vietnam to maintain and develop this program with the aim of improving the research and leadership capacity of Vietnamese research managers.

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Training on communications for ACIAR country offices

What is a good photo/video and how to take one?
How essential is consent to using and captioning an image?
How to deliver an interesting story of a project to the right audience?

During a three-day training session on photography and storytelling in Indonesia in May 2017, ACIAR country office staff from 10 partner countries learnt guidelines and tips for better products for communication uses. On the first day they learnt and practiced photography and interview skills; on the next day they went on a field trip; and on the last day they told stories and discussed the lessons. The training was part of ACIAR’s annual country office meeting, facilitated by visual storyteller Conor Ashleigh, Dr Peter Horne (ACIAR General Manager – Country Programs), and AgImpact.

ACIAR’s program has brought massive benefits throughout its projects to all partner countries. Stories about each project are worth sharing, from all perspectives: human interest, scientific findings, economic growth, environmental conservation, gender equality, policy, and capacity building; or challenges and lessons from failures. Many ACIAR projects are excellent at delivering their messages to target audience and the public, but many should communicate more to a wider audience both within and beyond the project.

The training aimed to make country officers aware of the role of communication in promoting science, and introduce them to basic tools and techniques to make communication products that deliver key messages to the target audience. The attendees were enthusiastic about the training, as all the staff acknowledged that communications were important and were keen on learning more – particularly about photography and social media.

Having joined the training workshop as a learner, I received valuable knowledge and skills to apply to my communications work at the ACIAR Vietnam office. The session facilitators’ instructions and participants’ contributions enabled me to identify the appropriate approach and method to produce a good communication product, such as a photo, a story, or a video clip, that would suit a particular circumstance.

My eyes were opened during the field visit to a successful project on beef cattle in Lombok, Indonesia, where all the farmers in the village keep their cattle cage by cage in a single place. The farmers took care of their own cattle, but also divided work responsibilities to keep their shared environment safe and clean. The farmers told stories about their families, how the project changed their lives, their plans to expand business, and the next generation’s passion to maintain the model to make the community sustainably prosperous. We used materials collected from the field visit in the storytelling session, in which we had to tell about an unintentional and unexpected result of the project – such as very young people’s dedication to agriculture. The lesson indicated that there is always a deeper layer of a story to discover, when we, as storytellers, truly pay attention.

I find it interesting that every partner involved in any ACIAR project had their unique story, regardless of who they are, or what they contribute to and receive from the research. It also amazes me how culture and community lifestyle shape the local livelihoods, and how much effort partners devote to a research project. I wish to share through communications products as many of the inspirational and influential messages from the people I have met. Good stories are worth sharing.
Hello, could you please introduce yourself?

My name is H’Duc Mlo. I am in charge of veterinary medicine and agricultural extension in Suk village, Eadar commune, Eakar district, Dak Lak province. My village has 400 households, 90 of which are poor households. Most of them, like myself, belong to the Ede ethnic group. I often help them with the basics of caring, drenching, vaccinating, feeding, and handling of cattle. I love my job and take care of other farmers’ cattle as if they are mine. I am also a beef cattle farmer. At present, my family has 12 cows.

How did you start this work?

After finishing vocational training course and coming back to my village, I have been fortunate to participate in some projects in communes and districts, attend workshops, conferences, and field trips since 2012. However, it was not until 2014, with help from extension workers and veterinarians from the district, ACIAR, and some previous programs, that I was able to establish a club of 10 households that want to raise beef cattle for profit.

Could you please give further details about this Beef cattle club?

The club has been restructured several times, but now has 21 people who meet once to twice a month. Members of the club discuss and exchange information related to growing fodder grass, breeding cattle, diseases, composting, and improving multi-crop gardens. Sometimes, university lecturers and livestock researchers from ACIAR projects attend the meetings and teach club members. The club also serves as a bridge between farmers and cattle dealers. Club members in Eadar are poor and belong to ethnic minorities. Every time the club organizes activities, other households come to see and listen to learn each other’s experiences.
What are the difficulties that you have overcome?

There are a lot of difficulties. Let’s take my story about improving multi-crop garden as an example. In Suk village, farmers have various kinds of plants in their gardens, which are mainly multi-crop gardens, so the productivity is not high. That is why I wanted them to transform these low-income gardens into grass-growing gardens. Mr Nhien, a district extension worker, was very enthusiastic. He went to each household with me to convince them to grow grass for cattle. At first I convinced farmers such as fresh college graduates who were eager, interested in growing grass, and open to changes. I also convinced some of my own relatives because I knew that I would still have supporters in the worst case.

When I first grew grass, my mother strongly opposed it. She did not like it. Then, I told her: “You gained 3-5 million VND from growing coffee, so I will pay you that amount of money. Just let me try growing grass in our garden.” After the first year, my cattle did not consume all the grass so I earned 18 million VND just from selling the grass seeds. At that time, my mother was very happy, and the news spread like wildfire. Everyone wanted to learn and grow grasses because, with this method, they would not need to graze the cattle in the field or spend time looking for grasses anymore.

Then, I intended to expand the scale because I was aware the scheme had potential. I did not have any capital, so I discussed with my husband borrowing 100 million VND from the bank to repair the cages and buy new cows to improve the herd quality.

My brother and sister-in-law saw me doing well so they wanted to follow me. After I had implemented the model for a year, they decided to adopt it. Once they started, they became even more successful because my brother’s father-in-law is a cattle dealer. Thanks to his father-in-law, he can gain more market information. Sometimes, he only raises the cattle for short-term fattening, but it is more profitable than when I raise breeding cows. However, he cannot have as much information about veterinary and farming techniques as my husband and me!

The surrounding households also started to plant grasses. The project supports have been small but timely to encourage the farmers. Now raising beef cattle with new methods has improved the environment and reduced diseases in women and children. Before, when each household had about six cows, no one ever thought about making cages. They had to graze the cattle and look for grasses from far away to keep them fed. It was very difficult. Now, I can just sit down and cut the grasses, while my husband can put grass in the cages for cattle. Back then, when I was in charge of raising the herd, I had to go from place to place by myself without help or support from others. Now, it is different; my husband and I work together and support each other.

What do you expect in the future?

I am attending a course on artificial insemination for beef cattle at Tay Nguyen University. I also want to learn from models in other regions. I heard that there are similar beef cattle clubs in Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces, which also participate in ACIAR projects. I am keen on visiting them and learning from their experiences. I want to improve the herd quality in my locality. In addition, I look forward to establishing an agricultural co-operative which can support people in both husbandry and crop management, and I dream of becoming a bridge between farmers and scientists and other important partners.
Beef rolls with H’mong mustard greens

By Nguyen Thu Thao, ACIAR Vietnam. Acknowledged recipe from ACIAR project ‘Towards more profitable and sustainable vegetable farming systems in North-West Vietnam’ (AG8/2012/059).

About the dish

The dish’s main ingredients are beef and mustard greens, both of which are produces from ACIAR’s vegetables and beef cattle projects in Vietnam with good quality. The dish is a traditional specialty of the north-west cuisine in Vietnam with the harmonious combination of well-seasoned beef, fresh fruits and vegetables, especially the peppery taste of H’Mong mustard greens, and the oyster and wasabi dipping sauce. Normally, during the hot summer in Vietnam, this culinary delight stands out as a perfect choice as it is not only delicious but also nutritious. While the beef serves as the key protein, mustard greens provide essential nutrients such as vitamins B and C as well as beta-carotene.
Recipe (serves six)

Ingredients:
- 500 g beef fillet
- 12 H’Mong mustard green leaves
- 12 spring onions
- 1 knob of ginger
- 2 green bananas
- 2 unripe starfruits
- 1 pineapple
- 1 carrot

Ingredients for dipping sauce:
- 1 tsp fish source or ½ tsp salt
- 3 garlic cloves
- 3 red shallots
- ½ tsp vinegar
- 1 tsp sugar
- 2 tsp wasabi sauce
- 2 tsp oyster sauce

Method:

- Slice the beef fillet into 6cm strips. Then, add fish sauce and toss sliced ginger through the beef strips. Set aside for 10 minutes to allow the flavours to develop.

- Bring a saucepan of water to boil and poach the beef in the simmering water for one minute. Remove the beef and drain well.

- Poach the spring onions in a saucepan of boiling water for a few seconds until they have wilted. Plunge the spring onions into cold water so they retain their colour. Remove the chilled spring onions and drain well.

- Slice green bananas, unripe starfruits, pineapple, and carrot into 6cm strips.

- Finely chop garlic cloves and red shallots.

- Make oyster and mustard dipping sauce by adding oyster sauce, mustard sauce, chopped garlic cloves, chopped red shallots, sugar, and vinegar into a small bowl. Then stir until the sauce is ready.

- Trim the mustard green leaves to roughly 10 cm. Then place a leaf on a chopping board with the vein side up. Roll the poached beef, cut vegetables and fruits within the mustard green leaf. Fold the leaf over to enclose the filling and beef rolling. To secure the roll, place the spring onion around the roll and tie with a knot, making a small bow. Repeat with the remaining ingredients serve the rolls with the dipping sauce.

About the projects

Mustard greens and beef, two key ingredients of the dish, can be produced from ACIAR projects on vegetables and beef cattle in Vietnam. Each project has made their own progress to overcome challenges but they have all achieved particular outcomes in various aspects.

Both focusing on North West Vietnam where lies the excellent potential for vegetable development, the ACIAR projects: ‘Improved market engagement for counter-seasonal vegetable producers in North West Viet Nam’ (AGB/2009/053) and ‘Towards more profitable and sustainable vegetable farming systems in North West Vietnam’ (AGB/2012/059) have made valuable contribution to the safe vegetable production which is not only profitable but also sustainable for Vietnamese farmers. The counter-seasonal vegetable project (AGB/2009/053), led by Dr Gordon Rogers from the University of Sydney, has accomplished a knowledgeable and resilient smallholder-based supply system and a sustainable linkage between modern retailers and vegetable producers in North West. Each year, hundreds of tons of Moc Chau safe vegetables are produced and supplied to Hanoi markets in compliance with strict criteria. Meanwhile, the indigenous vegetable project (AGB/2012/059), led by Dr Dale Yi from the University of Adelaide, aims to enhance the profitability and sustainability of smallholder vegetable farmers (particularly...
women and ethnic minorities) in North West through improved market engagement and integrated resource and disease management practices. Noticeably, the project has played active role in increasing market opportunities for women farmers in vegetable production.

With the aim to improve smallholders’ income through more productive and efficient beef cattle production, ACIAR projects: ‘Developing productive and profitable smallholder beef enterprise in Central Vietnam’ (LPS/2012/062) and ‘Intensification of beef cattle production in upland cropping systems in North West Vietnam’ (LPS/2015/037) have been implemented. The beef cattle project in the Central (LPS/2012/062), led by Dr David Parsons from the University of Tasmania, has completed value chain analyses, baseline studies of cow-calf system, and on-farm cow-calf feeding trial. Besides, it also conducted training courses for capacity building of project research staff, extension workers, and staff from Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. On the other hand, the new beef cattle project in North West (LPS/2015/037) has taken its initial steps towards achieving the aim to improve profitability of smallholder farmers through intensification of beef cattle production and increased market linkages in mountainous crop-livestock systems in the area. Recently, the project held the inception meeting together with field visits in Dien Bien city to have further discussion on the implementation plans together with its potential links with ACIAR’s previous beef project outcomes.