

# ACTAR

in Vietnam



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Duck waiting for sampling  
Project number AH/2004/040 (page 11)

## News

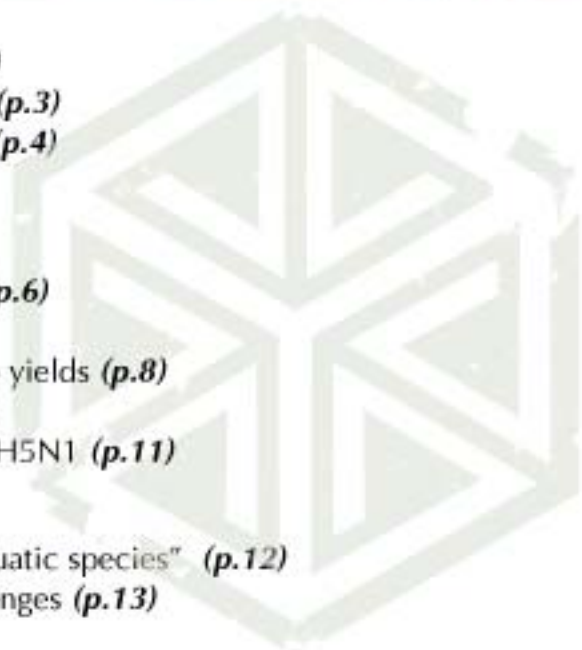
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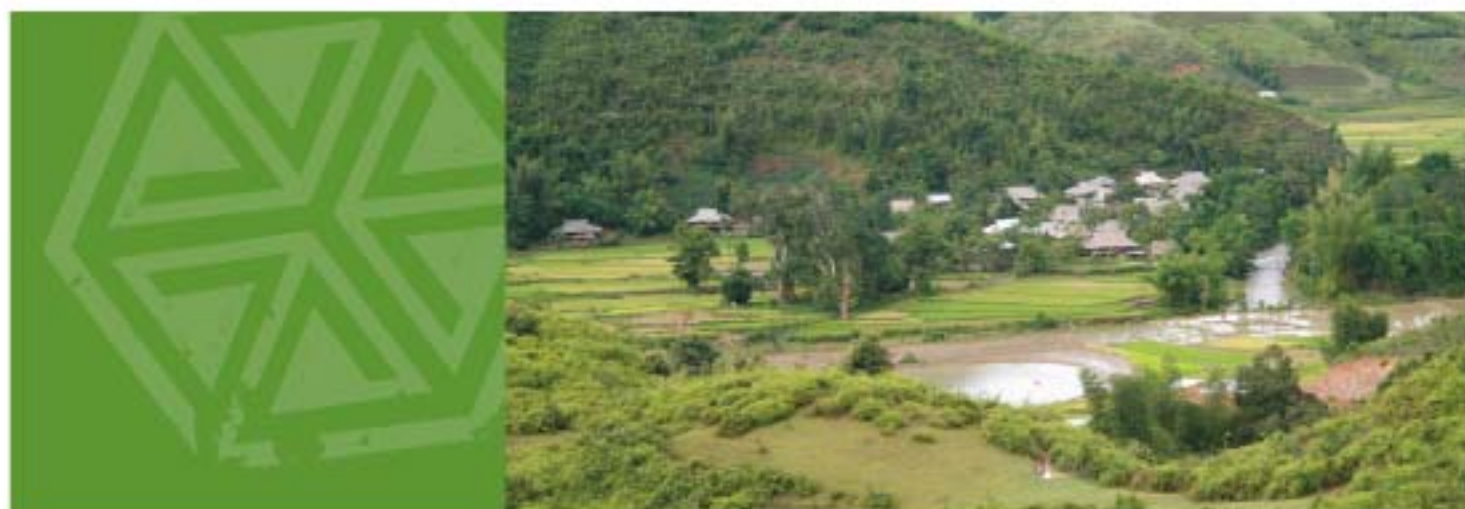
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## Research partnership for the north-west highlands of Vietnam

As mentioned in the last issue, the north-west highlands is one of the focus areas for ACIAR's Vietnam program for the next few years. This region is poor and characterised with steep uplands slopes with poor sustainability with current practices, and also a high diversity of ethnic groups with current difficulties in communication between farmers and Government. The area is however suitable for development of temperate agricultural crops where Australian expertise can assist. A workshop to develop a research partnership for the region will be held by ACIAR Vietnam from 20–21 September 2008 in Sapa, Lao Cai province.

Representatives from local provinces, central research institutions, non-Government organisations and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) will attend the workshop and together with Australian experts share their expertise, discuss issues and opportunities and identify research areas suitable for ACIAR to support. Presentations will be received from MARD presenting the national perspective, provincial issues presented by representatives from the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development, and a presentation of the results of a scoping study conducted by the Plant Protection Research Institute (Vietnam) and University of Queensland (Australia) on farmer needs and opportunities based principally on surveys of farmers and commune and district level agricultural staff.

The workshop will be conducted in two parts. The first part is to focus on the development of a medium-term research partnership program between ACIAR and Vietnam. The outcomes from this day will set the framework for ACIAR's investment in research over the coming years. This part will involve most of the high-level representatives and/or decision makers from Vietnamese authorities at the central and provincial levels, research institutes and ACIAR research program managers. The second part will focus on the development of an initial project as part of the medium-term research partnership program with active involvement of the potential practitioners.

The workshop is expected to have a set of clear outcomes. They include: an agreed partnership approach for the north west highlands; clear list of problems and research activities to address identified issues; an understanding of organisational capacity to contribute to the research; options for geographic focus areas; and clear linkages between activities and to other projects and programs. We look forward to the development of the north-west highlands as a main region for research to receive ACIAR support in the future. The next newsletter will report on the outcomes from this workshop.

## First awards of the John Fryer forestry scholarship fund



On 22 August, two young scientists from the Forest Science Institute of Vietnam, Mr Doan Ngoc Dao and Mr Doan Dinh Tam, received the inaugural awards for the John Fryer Forestry Scholarship Fund. Dr John Fryer was the ACIAR research program manager for Forestry from 1996 until 2004. He passed away suddenly while living in Hanoi in May 2007. Thanks to the initiative and planning of a number of John's work colleagues in Australia and Vietnam, the family established the John Fryer Forestry Scholarship Fund.

While John worked in many countries in Asia and the Pacific, he particularly enjoyed working in Vietnam and had a long association with forest scientists and research for over 10 years. Given he had spent so much of his time in Vietnam and lived in Hanoi for almost two years, it was agreed that the fund could be established to support the development of forest scientists in Vietnam. This scholarship fund is aimed to continue the work that John was doing and build on his legacy.

The focus of the scholarship is assistance to a PhD scholar with the operational costs for carrying out their studies, or improving the field work, or research work allowing them to deepen their understanding, or assistance with English training. The award is a small cash award of approximately \$2000. Candidates must demonstrate the difference the award will make to the quality and depth of their studies.

Mr Doan Ngoc Dao is studying for a PhD on 'Variation and inheritance of some growth characteristics and wood properties of *Acacia mangium*'. The focus of Dao's research funded under this scholarship will be to determine the variation in growth characteristics, stem quality and wood properties within and between clones of *Acacia mangium* in clonal test trials in Ba Vi, Ha Noi. Mr Dao will carry out selection and felling of representative trees and preparation of wood samples for analysis of wood density, wood collapse, shrinkage, moisture content, modulus of rupture and modulus of elasticity. Mr Dao will compare direct and indirect methods for some of these properties.

Mr Doan Dinh Tam is studying for a PhD on technical measures for planting *Schima wallichii* in mountainous provinces of north west Vietnam'. The support of the John Fryer scholarship will help Tam to research more deeply on light systems of *Schima wallichii* in nursery stages. Tam will evaluate seedling growth under four different light conditions, and for each condition carry-out sampling of growth measurements and plant health. The project is part of a larger study on regeneration and silviculture of *Schima wallichii* being carried out by the Forest Science Institute of Vietnam. The results will be written up in a technical manual for planting.

The two scholars were presented their awards by the Australian Ambassador to Vietnam, HE Mr Bill Tweddell, also a family friend of John Fryer. Towards the end of the year, the selection committee will seek to identify further candidates. Congratulations to Dao and Tam!

## Project development for sustainable and profitable crop and livestock systems for south central coastal Vietnam (SMCN/2007/109)



In the last newsletter we reported on the outcomes of a workshop in Quy Nhon in March that identified priority areas for ACIAR-funded research in the south central coastal region of Vietnam. Following this workshop, in June a delegation of scientists from Australia spent a week in the region to further develop an integrated multidisciplinary project. The group included soil scientists from the Department of Agriculture and Food, in Western Australia, Murdoch University in Western Australia, and livestock scientists from Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research.

The project is designed around three components. A value-chain component that will research the marketing chains of selected crops and comparative advantage to other regions in southern Vietnam and identify possible interventions and market facilitation. The soil management component will improve the understanding of resource constraints to agricultural production and promising farming practices for the region. Options for particular crops and cropping systems will be evaluated for their sustainability and profitability. The livestock component will research suitable forages and agricultural systems for incorporating livestock into the farming system specific to this region.

The project document is currently being developed and in September project staff from Australia will discuss further how these three components can effectively link together. Australian project staff may visit Vietnam again later this year to finalise project arrangements with the local partner institutes. The main institute partners will be the Agricultural Science Institute for South Central Coastal of Vietnam (ASISOV), Institute of Agriculture Science for South Vietnam, Southern Fruit Research Institute, Southern Sub-Institute of Agricultural Engineering and Post-harvest Technology and Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry. This project will be complimentary to the existing ACIAR project 'Improving the utilisation of water and soil resources for tree crop production in coastal areas in Vietnam and New South Wales' (SMCN/2003/035).

*Dr Gamini Keerthisinghe, ACIAR's research program manager for Soil Management and Crop Nutrition with Mr Bui Tat Vu, officer of the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development of Ninh Thuan province at the ASISOV's research station in Ninh Thuan.*



*Bill & Chris Tweddell with ACIAR Vietnam team. From left to right: Geoff, Phuong, Chris, An, Bill and Hung.*

## Good bye Bill & Chris

Ambassador Bill Tweddell and his wife Chris are soon to say 'goodbye' to Hanoi after three years in Vietnam. During this time, Bill always gave great support and encouragement to the agricultural research cooperation between Australia and Vietnam and the related project activities.

In thanks from the Vietnamese research institutes, a small reception was held at the Embassy. Dr Nguyen Van Bo, president of the Vietnam Academy for Agricultural Science (VAAS) and a group of representatives from research institutes attended to bid farewell and say 'thank you'. Bill was presented with a small gift, a picture depicting a typical Vietnamese agricultural scene. The representatives included leaders of the National Institute for Soils and Fertilisers, Plant Protection Research Institute, Fruit and Vegetable Research Institute, Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute, and the Centre for Agrarian Systems Research and Development. The staff of ACIAR Vietnam office and representatives of AusAID's rural development team also joined the reception.

Bill was touched by the Vietnamese friends' appreciation and sincerity. 'Vietnam is one of the places my wife and I will come back', he said. Chris will actually return to work in the ACIAR office in Canberra, from which she has been on leave while living overseas. The Vietnam office looks forward to working with Chris in the future. We all wish Bill and Chris to have a good return to Canberra, more success in the future and look forward to welcoming them back to Vietnam!



*Gift presenting by Dr Nguyen Van Bo*

## FSIV scientists are breeding new polyploid *Acacia* varieties for plantation forestry

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From project "Development and evaluation of sterile triploids and polyploid breeding methodologies for commercial species of *Acacia* in Vietnam, South Africa and Australia. (FST/2003/002)

By Rod Griffin, Jane Harbard, Ha Huy Thinh, Le Dinh Kha

Acacias for wood production were introduced to Vietnam less than 30 years ago. Prof Le Dinh Kha, former director of the Forest Science Institute of Vietnam's (FSIV) Research Centre for Forest Tree Improvement (RCFTI), first observed vigorous spontaneous hybrids of *A. mangium* x *A. auriculiformis* at Ba Vi field station in 1991–92 and by 1993 trees had been cloned and the first field trials of hybrid selections were established. Pedigreed breeding populations of the parent species *A. mangium* and *A. auriculiformis* were introduced in 1995 and by 1996 the first release of hybrid clones for commercial production were made (Martin Van Bueren, *Acacia* hybrids in Vietnam. Impact Assessment Series Report No. 27 ACIAR 2004).

Fast forward to 2010 and the expectation is that, under the Vietnamese Government 5MHRP (5 million hectares Reforestation Program), there will be over 200,000 ha of acacia hybrid plantations established. These trees will produce pulpwood for domestic mills, woodchips for export, wood for medium-density fibreboard, sawlogs for furniture and fuelwood for rural populations.

Through an ongoing collaboration with the University of Tasmania and CSIRO in Australia, FSIV scientists are now developing a new approach to acacia breeding, by manipulating ploidy (number of chromosome copies). Breeders of many plant species have used this technique in the search for higher value crops but it is new science for these tropical acacias. The project aims to produce triploids (3N) formed by mating normal diploid (2N) and tetraploid (4N) parents which will be reproductively sterile. This confers several possible advantages for plantation forestry:

- More harvestable woody biomass may be produced if energy is not invested in maturing fruits and seeds.
- *Acacia* has a reputation as a weed in some exotic environments. Planting of sterile genotypes will help manage this risk.
- If/when genetic modification technology is developed in the future the availability of commercial sterile genotypes will help overcome concern about 'genetic pollution'.

FSIV research on polyploids commenced in 2001 with a donation of tetraploid (4N) *Acacia mangium* plants by Shell International Renewables Ltd. From these cultures RCFTI multiplied mother plants at Ba Vi field station and subsequently established three field trials designed to encourage natural hybridisation between rows of the selected best clones of *A. mangium* and *A. auriculiformis* diploid (2N), and induced tetraploid (4N) *A. mangium*.

RCFTI have harvested open pollinated seed from one trial at Bau Bang (Binh Duong province) in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Open pollinated seed from 4N mothers has been shown to produce viable 4N progeny, which are now planted in a field trial at Ba Vi field station in Vietnam. But to date no triploid plants have been detected. An alternative approach of using controlled pollinations between ploidy/species combinations was carried out in November 2007 and seed harvested in May 2008. These seeds are now being germinated to screen for triploids. The field performance of these seedlings will provide important information on the practical role of this new approach in the ongoing effort by FSIV to breed yet more valuable trees for the benefit of Vietnamese farmers and wood processing industries.



## Improving competitiveness of pig producers in an adjusting Vietnam market (LPS/2005/063)

### The context

Pigs play important roles in the economy of Vietnam, providing food and employment. Pork constitutes about 75% of total meat consumption in the country and is mainly produced by smallholders. They are facing many risks, including genetic stock, quality of feeds, animal health problems and also market access. In recent years, large-scale commercial pig production has been increasing and various forms of vertical integration or other forms of contract farming are emerging to address risks faced by producers, uniform and higher quality requirements of processors, and demand for better quality pork from consumers. However, these market structures are often ill-suited to the characteristics of smallholders, and it is unclear what institutional form(s) is (are) best suited to increasing smallholder access to high value market chains.

In this context, the national priorities of both Vietnam and ACIAR's country strategy for Vietnam focus on mechanisms to alleviate poverty by enhancing smallholder participation in remunerative markets. The objective of this project is to find out the on-going dynamics of the pig sector and on that basis, policy, institutional and technology options for greater smallholder participation in markets alongside large-scale production.

### Partnerships

With financial support from ACIAR and core funding contribution from the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the three-year project (2007–2010) is being implemented in Vietnam by Vietnamese and international partners. The Center for Agricultural Policy of the Institute for Policy and Strategy for Agricultural and Rural Development (CAP-IPSARD) is the main Vietnamese partner. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the University of Queensland (UQ) in Australia and Oxfam are the main international partners. Other strategic partnerships for policy advocacy, communication and uptake of project findings and recommendations have also been identified, e.g. FAO's Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Initiative and a new organisation Prosperity Initiative.

### First year accomplishments

The project hit the ground running in 2007 with an inception workshop in June. A wide audience of key stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, non-government organisations, researchers, pig producers, and donor agencies) were invited to the project inception workshop where the key stakeholders indicated their interest and support for the project. Outcome Mapping (OM) was also employed to elicit feedback from key stakeholders and partners about their expectations.

A policy advocacy and communication strategy for the project was developed. A Project Steering Committee comprising representatives from national and international organisations involved in the agriculture sector was formed to provide a forum for discussions about policy advocacy and communication strategies for the Project to ensure impacts.

A series of participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) surveys was undertaken in July to September 2007. These surveys are to provide a broad characterization of the existing pig supply chains and the key actors within the chain as well as insights from key informants on trends in supply of and demand for pigs and pork and the market conditions driving these trends. The results from PRA surveys highlighted the differences in market channels used and types of market actors involved in these channels by large and small pig producers. Key constraints to production and marketing were identified by pig producers using problem tree analysis. Perceptions about the degree of importance and sphere of influence of key institutions were also highlighted.

## >> Next

There were two types of surveys completed within the first year. The urban consumption survey was implemented in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City – the two biggest cities in Vietnam. The production and rural consumption survey was carried out in six other provinces in the northern, central and southern regions of the country.

Another survey on the market actors will soon be implemented to complete the picture of the supply chain for pork in Vietnam. Policy modelling will also be done in 2009 with selected Vietnamese team members to undertake hands-on training in developing and implementing a pig sector model for Vietnam.

### Sharing findings

A stakeholder workshop to present preliminary findings from the urban and rural consumer surveys was organised on 22 August where key stakeholders were invited to provide feedback to the findings. A brainstorming session on strategizing for communication and policy advocacy followed the stakeholder workshop wherein concrete steps on how to effectively communicate and facilitate policy advocacy to generate the desired outcomes and impacts from the project were identified. A midterm review workshop is also scheduled during the first quarter of 2009 where the full results from the various surveys will also be presented and discussed together with the convening of the Project Steering Committee.

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## Vietnam strengthens ecologically based rodent management for greater crop yields

*From project "Implementation of rodent management in intensive irrigated rice production systems in Indonesia and Vietnam" (ADP/2003/060)*

Rodents are an important pest in irrigated rice in many countries in the world. Rodents reduce food production both before and after the harvest. In Asia, pre-harvest yield loss due to rat damage is estimated at up to 5-10% and up to 30-50%. In Vietnam, rodents are in the top three most important pests in rice cultivation. However, farmers have indicated that rodents are the problem they have the least control over and their rodent control practices rely essentially on chemical methods. Past ACIAR projects on rodents developed integrated ecological rodent management (IERM) that significantly reduce chemical use in controlling rats. In order to extend this knowledge to farmers in Vietnam, this project has been implemented with the coordination of the Plant Protection Department (PPD) (Vietnam), and includes CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems (Australia), the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Plant Protection Research Institute (PPRI), Institute of Agricultural Sciences of South Vietnam (IAS), and World Vision, Vietnam.

The project started in February 2006 and has been implemented in two provinces, An Giang and Ha Nam where rats have become a big problem in rice cultivation in recent years. In 2007, project activities concentrated on training farmers and regional extension staff to encourage adoption of sustainable IERM, establishing community actions (ICA) and setting up community trap barrier systems (CTBS), and improving communication and dissemination.

Sixteen CTBS have been set up under support of the project and another 16 CTBS have been set up from provincial financial resource. The co-investment demonstrates the strong participation and involvement of provincial authorities. The initial results show that CTBSs can attract many rats with the average number of 151 individuals per trap per rice crop in Ha Nam and 118 individuals per trap per rice crop in An Giang. Farmers are also more actively taking part in protecting CTBS. Difficulties in maintaining CTBS in Ha Nam in 2006 were completely resolved.

In parallel hundreds of farmers and technical officials have received training in biology, ecology of rodents and integrated ecologically-based rodent management, and techniques for setting up CTBS. In Ha nam, there was one training course for Provincial Plant Protection officials and 24 training activities were conducted with the participation of 480 farmers. In An giang, there were two training courses for regional technical officials and six course for about 300 farmers. The initiative to coordinate IERM into the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) class in Ha Nam has also attracted more interest and participation of farmers in province.

One significant activity of the project is establishing community actions which includes synchronised cropping, field sanitation, community campaigns at key times in both Ha Nam and An Giang. In the summer-autumn crop of An Giang, 6 community actions have been launched in An Nong, Tinh Bien and Lac Quoi, Tri Ton. Total rats caught by traps in this crop in these CA was up to 70kg (equal to 300 individuals). In autumn-winter crop 2007, in co-operation with the World Vision and PPD, two other CAs have been launched in these two communes which has shown strong impacts to enhance knowledge of farmers in IERM. In Ha Nam, four CAs were also conducted with the participation of more than 400 farmers.

Farmer diaries were collected every two weeks and damage is assessed at three key stages of crop growth. Initial results show that yields on treatment sites are higher than on reference sites and the cost of rodent management actions and pesticide use are less expensive on treatment sites than on reference site at a village scale.

Given the successful results to date, in 2008–2009, more training, CA and CTBS, cross district visits, and demonstration sites are planned. The project will produce technical documents in integrated ecologically-based rodent management, such as leaflets, handbooks, audio and video tapes to provide to farmers. In order to reach that objective, the cooperation between local authorities and mass media agencies will specially be considered.



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## Increasing the skills of women in the safe production, promotion and utilisation of indigenous vegetables in Vietnam (AGB/2006/112)

By Michelle Smith and Virginia Brunton

*"We stand back to back, me looking west, you looking east but we still share the same horizon".*

This analogy describes the philosophy of this ACIAR project. Working in conjunction with the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) the project is led by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), NSW with a shared vision to improve the livelihoods of some of the poorest women farmers in Vietnam. Using Participatory Action Research women farmers will be provided with the skills to safely and sustainably produce selected indigenous vegetables for markets across the region.

Three communes in the newly formed Tan Son district, Minh Dai, Xuan Dai, and Xuan Son, have been selected for the initial stage with the long-term aim of spreading the work to at least three other districts.

### Workshops

During the April visit by the Australian project team, Virginia Brunton, project leader, Jenny Ekman, postharvest specialist and Michelle Smith, project officer, workshops were conducted in each of the communes. Together with staff from the Centre for Agrarian Systems Research and Development (CASRAD), Plant Protection Sub-department (PPSD) and the VWU, women farmers used participatory diagnostic tools to select potential indigenous vegetables that best suited their needs. Commune teams have now begun to work with project officer, Phan Thuy Hien to identify ways that supporting institutions can ensure they have the capacity to produce the selected vegetables to a marketable standard.

Another workshop was conducted by Le Toan, PPSD with support from Bui Thi Thai and Le Thi Nham of CASRAD and VWU project assistant Dao Thi Hanh and in June 2008. Local

officers, extension workers, and VWU members at district and commune level were trained to:

- understand the benefits of participatory approaches
- experience examples of activities and tools to apply in the field
- be able to apply this approach to implementing project activities.

This will ensure that farmers' needs are central to the research at all stages in the project.

### Capacity building

A team from CASRAD is undertaking research to establish economic benchmarks and market potential for the selected indigenous vegetables. It is also expected that the Australian team will undertake resource development to aid in the training of farmers particularly in safe use of chemicals, pest and disease control and soil management.

### Australian component

As part of the project, the DPI is working with a group of Vietnamese women farmers in the Sydney Basin. Like their counterparts in Vietnam these women have often been isolated from traditional forms of Government support. The project is trialling different varieties of bitter melon or *Momordica charantia* with the aim of extending both the production levels and the growing season for the vegetable in the Sydney Basin.

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# Investigations into the maintenance and transmission of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in domestic duck populations in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam (AH/2004/040)

*Joerg Henning, Kate Henning, Nguyen Truc Ha, Ngo Thanh Long, Joanne Meers, Pham Phong Vu, Dong Manh Hoa, Le Hong Phong*

Highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus has been causing outbreaks of disease in poultry and deaths in humans since 2003. Indonesia and Vietnam are two of the countries most severely affected by H5N1 HPAI in terms of both human and poultry health. Despite the control measures introduced in these countries, cases of HPAI infection continue to occur in people and poultry. A three-year project was established in 2006 to investigate the proposed role of ducks as maintenance hosts for H5N1 infection. Longitudinal studies are being conducted in both countries to examine the patterns of infection over a 12-month period among ducks and in-contact chickens on small-scale commercial and backyard farms.

In Vietnam, five smallholder duck farms were selected from 16 villages in eight districts of four provinces (Ben Tre, Tien Giang, Soc Trang, Dong Thap) in the Mekong Delta to participate in the study. The flocks were monitored at bi-monthly intervals, with seven ducks and three chickens sampled from each farm. When available, samples were also obtained from unvaccinated sentinel birds. Questionnaires were used to collect information on changes in flock structure, husbandry practices, marketing, health status of ducks, HPAI outbreaks and flock vaccination status. Blood samples and swabs were collected and tested for the presence of H5 antibodies or virus, respectively.

To date, diagnostic results of samples from four collection times have been compiled. Most of the birds in the study were reported by the farmers to be vaccinated. The antibody prevalence in vaccinated ducks and chickens was 56% and 39%, respectively from > 4 weeks post vaccination. No mortality due to HPAI was reported in any of the study villages. The results suggest that, although some birds failed to produce protective antibody titres following vaccination, the flock immunity was able to prevent HPAI disease outbreaks in the face of frequent exposure of birds to HPAI H5 field virus (indicated by 16% and 13% of unvaccinated sentinel ducks and chickens, respectively carrying H5 antibodies). However, this must be interpreted with caution because an incorrect recording of the vaccination status could have confounded the results from the sentinel birds. Nevertheless the levels of virus shedding were very low with H5 virus being detected in swabs from only one farm in the study villages over the four sampling periods.

Analysis of the full data set from the longitudinal study will be conducted shortly to elucidate the role played by ducks in the maintenance of H5N1 virus. This information will help to better understand the epidemiology of the disease in ducks and to assist policy-makers in developing improved HPAI control measures and surveillance strategies. Monitoring infection in ducks may help to reduce the risk of virus transmission to other poultry species and to humans.

A case-control study was also conducted in Vietnam to identify flock-level risk factors associated with the HPAI outbreaks that occurred from December 2006 to January 2007 in the Mekong Delta region. It appeared that vaccination status, other poultry species kept on the farm and the presence of visitors at the farm were the most important risk factors.



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## Applied population genetics for aquatic species



*Under the sponsorship of Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Research Institute for Aquaculture No.3 co-ordinated with Queensland University of Technology to hold the training course "Applied population genetics for aquatic species".*

The purpose of this training is to improve research capacity in population genetics for scientists and teachers of institutes and universities in Vietnam.

The training course was divided in two stages:

- First stage (15–18 Jan 2008): All participants of this course were taught theory of applied population genetics for aquatic species and to combine with practicing DNA analysis of mud crab (*Scylla* sp.) by PCR technology in the laboratory.
- Second stage (18–20 Jun 2008): All participants studied the theory of various methods in genetics such as: microsatellites, AFLP's, PCR, and experimental design in population genetics. Participants also analysed freshwater crabs collected in Vietnam by PCR technology. Concurrently with studying theory, participants were also instructed to use and analyse data on some specialised software that are applied in population genetics, such as: Mega, Arlequin, FSTAT, TCS version 2.1.

There were two lecturers from Queensland University of Technology – Australia: Associate Prof. Dr Peter Mather, and Dr David Hurwood, and PhD Candidate Le Van Chi – Research Institute for Aquaculture No.3 to conduct the teaching of this training course. All participants are the scientists and teachers to come from Research Institute for Aquaculture No.1, 3 and Quy Nhon University, Nha Trang University.

At the end of the course, Dr Nguyen Thi Xuan Thu – Director of Research Institute for Aquaculture No.3 and Associate Prof. Dr Peter Mather presented the course certificate to these participants.

## The John Allwright fellowship: opportunities and challenges

In October 2006, a great event happened to me. I obtained a John Allwright Fellowship to study for a PhD degree at the University of Western Australia (UWA), a beautiful and reputable university in Australia. The Fellowship gave me the opportunity to work with professional scientists in Agricultural and Resource Economics and to gain experience in a modern educational system. The unique characteristics of the scholarship bring me chances to further my studies, as well as challenges that require much personal effort.

Helpful assistance from ACIAR in Vietnam and Australia is encouraging me to overcome obstacles in study, social life and living in a different culture. At times, these struggles have been exhausting. However, assistance plans have been put together that include an orientation program, English course, housing and tutoring etc. These key factors have helped me to face the challenges and to concentrate on my study.

During the scholarship period, I have a chance to establish a research network with other colleagues attending the training workshops or conferences organised annually in Canberra. The scholarship becomes more meaningful when I can undertake field trips in Vietnam for my research, also. The field trips will help enhance my research capacity and increase my potential contribution to Vietnam's economy. A typical benefit of the scholarship is that, after finishing my study, I will have a chance to obtain a research grant supported by ACIAR for developing or applying the knowledge I have gained. The benefits mentioned above are great, but at the same time, the challenges that arise are obvious, especially in language and research.

Using English language is a challenge that I have faced from commencement until now. The challenge is not only in academic writing but also in giving verbal explanations of my work. The difficulty is transferring and expressing my thinking from Vietnamese into English. Researching in English is not an easy task, even for native speakers. The challenge here is that I have been too busy in my research to spend much time practicing English. Before commencing

the course, ability in English is necessary, but it needs to be developed continuously during the study period.

I would share the experience that, 'Before and after arrival in Australia, try to place yourself in a situation where you should use English all the time. The university's English requirement is just the starting point; you can achieve it, but that does not mean you can survive in uni-life'.

PhD study in UWA is totally different from my experience as a Masters and Undergraduate student in Vietnam. In general, a PhD requires one to contribute original ideas to global knowledge. In other words one should say something new. It is not easy to conceptualise an academic problem up to PhD level. Doing a PhD is a long trip with many anxieties, much effort and stress. In fact, obtaining new ideas, gathering information, critically analysing results and developing ideas are not easy. These are hard, and can cause one to feel tired, to be exhausted and to experience headaches.

At the same time as receiving benefits from the John Allwright Fellowship, I face many challenges. But I think this is a golden opportunity for me not only to gain knowledge, to broaden my mind and to improve my confidence, but also for it to be a period of wider personal development and growth in maturity. With all my personal effort I will finish my PhD on time, as expected by my family, friends, college and ACIAR.





I still remember the feeling when I knew that I could study at the University of Queensland with the John Allright Fellowship scholarship. I understood that it would not only be a good opportunity but it would also have challenges. The most difficult and important thing for me was that I had to deal with the English language. This seemed to be more of a struggle when I first came to Australia in February, 2007 than I thought. Honestly, I couldn't understand what people were saying to me and how to pass the IELTS was always in my head - that was so stressful. I tried to talk to anyone on the way to and from uni in order to practise English.

Regarding the cost of living in Australia, for example, let's make a comparison of one sandwich. It costs about 6.5 AUD while only 25 cents in Vietnam. Actually, I have not been worried about the living costs in Australia because my allowance is enough to pay for ordinary student living.

It is worth noting for students who are going to leave Vietnam for study in Australia that you should be familiar with a new routine. This includes no nap after lunch, a lot of walking, taking a bus timetable with you. However, when you get used to the new study/work schedule you will feel good about studying here. The knowledge that we gain can be well utilised once we return to Vietnam. Also, students have abundant chances to discover this multicultural country.

**Nguyen Thi My Phung**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank all contributors for sharing their news and views with us, as well as bearing with us if there are any printing/ editing errors. We would appreciate readers' contribution to the next issue by sending us your project's news/ update, photo news and/ or any story you deem relevant, to the address below:

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