

# Vietnam's farmers harness technology to raise crop yields

**A partnership between the government and the private sector has helped thousands of farmers in the country grow more food and transcend subsistence farming.**

Vietnamese farmer Ngo Quang Dinh gazes proudly at the lush rice fields that pervade the landscape of Dong Mai village. From the land he ploughs, Ngo has made enough money to move beyond subsistence farming. From sending his children to school to acquiring creature comforts, the prosperity the 57-year-old farmer enjoys is a far cry from the straits he found himself in during the 1990s when he struggled with poor harvests ravaged by pests and diseases.

Then, Ngo, who owns a three quarter-hectare farm in Bac Ninh province, was clueless about protecting his crops. He sprayed pesticides randomly, but to no avail.

“My productivity was low, and I was at a loss about managing the pests that were hurting my crops,” says Ngo, who has four children. “But all that changed with training at the Farmer Field School in my province. I learnt to use pesticides effectively and that has helped my rice output rise by 40 to 50 percent.”

Since 2003, CropLife Asia has joined with the Plant Protection Department (PPD) of Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to train farmers on effective ways to protect their crops, including ensuring food safety and preventing post-harvest losses. Existing programs that cover nine provinces nationwide focus on the responsible use of pesticides on vegetables, fruit and tea.

The success of the projects has spurred the PPD to increase its proposed spending in 2009 by tenfold to \$100,000, targeting some 2,030 farmers, including rice farmers in key growing areas. In 2008, the partners trained 1,015 farmers while 40,000 have learnt good agricultural practices through mass media campaigns, including TV contests for farmers.

Indeed, engaging farmers through TV programs has been a highly effective way to spread the word about the responsible use of pesticides. The contests, while appealing to farmers for their entertainment value, are educational at the same time.

Thanks as well to the TV contests, Ngo is able to keep abreast of the latest tips on how to farm better. With bigger harvests and a better income over the years, Ngo, now the vice director of a local agricultural cooperative, has added a second floor to his three-bedroom house and built a house for his sons and their spouses.





Like Ngo, 53-year-old Tran Thi Thung used to struggle with pest attacks on her tomato, vegetable and rice crops in her half-hectare farm in Dong Mai village. The mother of five lost her rice crop to leafhopper infestation in 1990 and grappled with problems such as mildew attacks on her tomatoes.

“To improve the quality and quantity of my crops, I was very keen to learn how to manage those problems, including techniques on when to apply pesticides, how much and ways to spray safely,” she says.

This means training farmers to adhere to the dosage and frequency as stated on the labels, including observing

the number of days one should refrain from spraying before harvest.

The training has provided her with access to technology that has helped her farm better and boost productivity by an average of 50 percent. Tran, who sells her produce through middlemen, is also able to grow bigger and juicier fruit these days that fetch higher prices. The higher income she has earned over the years is enough to send her children to school. Three of them are college graduates, and two of them are currently teachers, she says.

To be sure, moves by the PPD and CropLife Asia to help farmers harness agricultural technology for raising productivity at a time of food shortages will yield far-reaching benefits.

Ngo notes, “Previously, I was a subsistence farmer growing enough to feed myself and my family. Now, we grow enough to sell and make a good living. That’s how agricultural technology has made a difference to my life.”

## About CropLife Asia

CropLife Asia promotes the benefits and responsible use of crop protection and plant biotechnology products, as well as sound regulatory frameworks in support of sustainable agriculture in the Asia-Pacific region. As a regional unit of CropLife International – a global federation of the plant science industry in over 90 countries – CropLife Asia supports the work of 15 member associations and is led by member companies at the forefront of crop production research and development.

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