A cup of safe tea makes all the difference

In Vietnam, a ‘safe tea’ certificate can mean the difference between the deprivation of harsh poverty and a kinder quality of life for your family.

In late 2007, the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development introduced a quality control programme to regulate the management, production and processing of tea. Producers who follow strict guidelines are granted ‘safe tea’ certificates for their product.

Tran Thi Thanh is one of the beneficiaries of the ‘safe tea’ programme. She has been attending training classes for the past three years and has doubled the productivity of her 1.5 hectare farm.

Thanh and her husband produce tea in mountainous Yen Bai province. With more than 12,000 hectares grown, tea is one of the main crops of Yen Bai and 75% of Yen Bai’s people have tea groves. It is considered one of their most important crops and its production reduces poverty for the people of Yen Bai.

Food safety standards are critical. In the past, the value of Vietnamese tea has always been much lower than tea from other countries. This has largely been attributed to poor quality products and lack of credibility around food hygiene and safety. But that’s all changing now. Two-thirds of all tea products grown are now exported to foreign countries.
Tran Thi Thanh has taken Responsible Use Training classes offered by CropLife Asia plus classes offered through the Office of Plant Protection, a department of the Vietnamese government. These efforts train approximately 20,000 farmers each year. Both training programmes have been instrumental in changing not only her life, but the lives of countless farmers in Vietnam.

“A few years ago, productivity of our crops was low,” says Tran. “We have learned to double our productivity by strictly adhering to the Four Rights Principle: right pesticide, right dosage, right concentration and right time.”

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“Getting the message out to farmers, particularly in the mountainous regions of Vietnam, has taken considerable effort and coordination by several agencies, including the state’s Office of Plant Protection and industry associations such as CropLife Asia. Today, thanks to tremendous efforts by these agencies and Vietnamese tea producers, the tea sector has made remarkable progress. Tea output has increased by hundreds of thousands of tonnes per year.

Tran Thi Thanh has been working with tea since she was a young girl but wasn’t knowledgeable about the relationship between productivity and pest control. Since applying what she has learned in the field, the improvements have changed her life. “The productivity of our tea is much higher and so is the quality,” she says, as she shows off her crop in the field. “It’s Class A tea.”

She and her husband have struggled to raise their family of three children, all of whom are now grown. Two of them now have families of their own and their youngest will finish high school in 2009.

With the knowledge they now have to produce Class A tea, she and her husband are able to look after the crops themselves, allowing the children to go to school, get an education and find stable employment for the future. And for the one son still at home, he is now the proud owner of a motorcycle, allowing him to get to school easier, to pick up the odd off-farm job and to help with the transportation of their precious tea crop.