



Vietnam farmer Vang A Sa is one of the farmers growing accredited safe vegetables using VietGAP. Photo: Khanh Long, TTXVN.

# Accredited ‘safe’ vegetables help Vietnamese farmers earn more

Farmers in Northwest Vietnam are accessing a new path to market for their vegetables—via an accreditation program—to help them sell into high-value modern retail markets in Hanoi.

The vegetable sector is an important source of employment and income for the people of Moc Chau and Van Ho, Son La province. The region’s favourable climate and soil conditions are suitable for growing tropical, subtropical and some temperate vegetables.

With the development of supermarkets and food service market channels in Hanoi and other big cities, customers are now demanding high-quality agricultural products—especially ones from

## Key points

- 1** Farmers in the remote mountainous regions of Northwest Vietnam are changing how they grow vegetables.
- 2** By adhering to good growing practices under the VietGAP accreditation program, farmers can supply vegetables to supermarkets in urban centres.
- 3** Customers who purchase VietGAP-certified vegetables can be assured the produce has been managed in a way that excludes food-borne diseases and pathogens.



mountainous areas like Son La province—because customers believe they taste better and are more nutritious. Furthermore, customers want ‘safe’ vegetables which are grown using good agricultural production techniques and are managed to ensure the food is free of food-borne diseases and pathogens. However, in retail markets customers find it difficult to distinguish safe vegetables from vegetables that are not grown using sound practices or are not managed to maintain food safety.

The supply of vegetables to distant urban markets can be difficult. Vegetable production is small-scale, scattered and managed by individual farmers and small households, making it difficult for farmers to ensure continuity of supply. Moreover, widely

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Bui Van Tung, Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute

practised farming methods don’t meet the safe standards demanded by city consumers, precluding produce from high-value markets.

Complicating the issue is the problematic connection between retailers and farmers,

and in which contracts are often broken. As a result the local vegetable producers usually just sell their vegetables to the local markets or to Hanoi via traders.

### VietGAP certification

To help, ACIAR is supporting a project that helps Moc Chau and Van Ho farmers supply temperate vegetables such as tomatoes, lettuces and cabbages to Hanoi. The project centres around the Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices (VietGAP) accreditation program. VietGAP provides guidelines on how to grow crops and manage them post-harvest to ensure food safety and improve product quality and traceability while supporting the health of producers, consumers and the environment.

According to project leader Dr Gordon Rogers, Applied Horticultural Research, the approach the project team took to help the farmers was to first identify market drivers and consumer attitudes to certified safe vegetables. The project team then selected groups of smallholder vegetable

farmers in Moc Chau and Van Ho to work with who in turn then demonstrated how to use VietGAP on their farms and apply sustainable and inclusive smallholder vegetable value-chain models and quality assurance systems. They were also helped to develop pilot value chains and understand effective farmer group governance.

As a result farmers participating in the project have doubled their income to 300–380 million dong (A\$18,000–23,000) per hectare by supplying VietGAP-certified vegetables to markets in Hanoi compared with supplying vegetables through traditional channels.

In 2018, 160 project farmers across 10 villages in Moc Chau and Van Ho supplied 1,130 tonnes of VietGAP-certified safe vegetables to supermarkets and vegetable stores in Hanoi.

The project is actively trying to engage new retail markets to increase demand for VietGAP-certified safe vegetables.

‘Key to success is engaging new retail markets. In Hanoi, AEON supermarkets Long Bien and the Hapro chain of safe vegetable stores are now being supplied by project farmers,’ says Dr Rogers.

‘Long-standing collaborators including Big C Supermarkets, Bac Tom and Mega Market (formerly Metro) continue to market certified safe vegetables from Moc Chau and Van Ho.’

### Farmers reap benefits

Van Ho farmer 61-year-old Ms Dinh Thi Xoa is one of the first women to participate in the project. She set up a group—now called the Van Ho Safe Vegetable Cooperative—of seven initial members. In the beginning they faced many difficulties because they were not familiar with the process of growing and supplying safe vegetables. With technical support from the project, Ms Xoa has disseminated information to the group on how to grow vegetables to comply with VietGAP standards. The members have gradually changed their cultivation practices around soil preparation and fertiliser and pesticide use and have succeeded in growing many kinds of tomatoes, cabbages and lettuces.

‘At first people found it hard to strictly follow the VietGAP process—from writing reports and composting animal manure to using fertilisers and plant-protection chemicals properly and applying



Project officer Bui Van Tung (right) shows farmer Vang A Sa (left) common pests on cabbage and outlines prevention measures. Photo: Khanh Long, TTXVN.

the right pre-harvest interval [the time that must elapse between a chemical being applied and the crop being harvested],’ says Ms Xoa.

‘If any households fail to follow the process they will be immediately reminded by the inspection and supervision teams and warned that they will be excluded from the group.’

She added that the first few times the group grew vegetables they did not look good, were damaged and could not be sold.

‘People were discouraged but now everything is much better. Currently, the area in Van Ho where VietGAP vegetables are grown has reached 14.6 hectares and we are trying to recruit new members,’ she says.

In 2018, with the support of the project, Van Ho Safe Vegetable Cooperative sold more than 230 tons of vegetables to Big C in Hanoi and earned nearly two billion dong (around A\$160,000).

One of the members of Ms Xoa’s group is H’Mông farmer Mr Vang A Sa from Bo Nhang village, also in Moc Chau district. Mr Sa also participated in training to develop vegetable value chains organised by ACIAR.

Mr Sa established a group to grow VietGAP-certified vegetables, then developed a cooperative called Bo Nhang 2. He also bought a truck—with the capacity to carry between 1.5 and 2 tons of vegetables in each load—to transport produce to BigC, Metro, Aeon and Fivimart supermarkets in Hanoi on a regular basis.

‘Before, I planted one crop of rice or vegetables in a year and my income was only around 10 million dong [A\$630] a year. Since growing VietGAP-certified safe vegetables, my family’s income has increased several times,’ Mr Sa said. He adds that, after costs, his family’s income is now closer to 100 million dong [A\$6,300].

Key to supporting the work in Vietnam is local project officer Bui Van Tung from the Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute.

‘After only a short time of implementation the project has brought economic changes,’ says Mr Tung. ‘And, importantly, changed farmers’ mindsets regarding applying new and more modern farming practices.’

‘As the H’Mông people are a very close community there are now more farmers in the area participating in developing and expanding the scale of VietGAP vegetable production.’

The project commenced in 2015 and many farmers have learnt and adopted the new agricultural production method and are now growing VietGAP-certified safe vegetables. They have also been able to develop supply chains into Hanoi, access high-value markets and earn higher incomes. 🌱

**ACIAR PROJECT:** Improving livelihoods in Myanmar and Vietnam through the vegetable value chains, ABG/2009/053.