

A better life for Viet Nam's farmers

Increased economic prosperity through agro-processing

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Farmers in Viet Nam's Quang Binh province live in harsh conditions. This article, based on primary research conducted by the author and a colleague, examines the current cultivation methods and notes the lack of agro-product preservation, processing and marketing. The author argues that post-harvest technology is essential to ensure that these farmers obtain good returns for their products, while delivering quality to the market. He identifies four distinct categories of problems and proposes specific actions, at local government and at individual farmer and household level, to tackle them.



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Introduction

Quang Binh province is located in the northern half of Viet Nam, in a narrow strip of land along the coast, with the Gulf of Tonkin on the east and Laos on the west. It comprises six districts and one town, the latter connected by rail and Highway One running along the coast. Of its total area of 798,500 hectare, agriculture area forms just over 7 per cent, while waste land forms nearly 40 per cent. The oppressive climate - long periods of scorching sun and annual floods and storms - makes the cultivation of paddy and vegetable and forest products unpredictable, and living standards are very low and unstable.

Minh Hoa and Tuyen Hoa are the mountainous districts at the northwest corner of Quang Binh. Per capita agricultural land is very limited and it becomes impera-

tive to limit post harvest losses. In recent years, these two districts have been beneficiaries of the Integrated Food Security Project (IFSP), but farmers continue to live in difficult conditions.

One reason is that post harvest technology has still not reached them. This in turn is due to the lack or inadequacy of practical research and analysis of the technology requirements of the region. Post harvest technology depends on levels of industrialization and standardization, and a holistic approach.

The Duong Lieu example

Duong Lieu village has been processing cassava starch for 30 years, as well as edible canna starch to produce vermicelli. Annually, it produces 30,000 tonnes of cassava starch, 2,000 tonnes