Improvement of grassland value - an option for intensification of beef cattle production in upland cropping systems in North West Vietnam

Key Messages

- Cattle feeding and management solutions identified (ACIAR project LPS/2008/049), to overcome feed and forage shortage, the long cold winters
- Forage hedgerows introduced as erosion control in maize production (ACIAR project AGB/2008/002), although increasing competition for land use.
- Sustainable and efficient beef value chains required to link farmers with each other, key chain stakeholders, local authorities and markets.

Livestock-based solutions

- The North West is one of the poorest regions in Vietnam, with 66% of ethnic minority people dominating the remote mountains considered poor. Beef cattle production is a means for alleviating poverty and address environmental issues of intensified cropping.
- Smallholders involved in livestock-cropping systems: 1 – 3 cattle, small size cropping land, practice of tethered/free grazing in communal or private forest and pastures, seasonal feed shortage, and poor linkage to urban market; consequently, they are not capitalising on the recent increased demand for beef.
- Approaches: Quantification of the biophysical and socio-economic characteristics of existing farming systems; Value chain analysis including formation of interest groups; and On/off farms trials - testing viable management strategies for capitalizing on market opportunities and minimizing the impact of the cold, dry season and other important cattle production constraints.

Results and evidence

- Capacity building of farmers, their families and research institutions.
- Innovative extension for beef production including school based learning activities
- Awareness and understanding of the livestock system and market value chain components.
- New forage, feeding options and shelter solutions for growth limiting conditions.
- The perception about the value of grasslands is directly related to the success of beef cattle value chains in the regions.

Multiplier effects

- The linkage of farmer organization with traders and local institutions can develop beef value chain as well as enhance the effort in improving grassland value for feed availability.
- Clear benefits including demonstrating the potential of introduced interventions; however, adoption of the project outputs was limited over the life of the project because the main focus was to identify solutions to constraints of the beef cattle production system as part of a mixed farming system.
- Based on the outcomes and momentum from the current project a follow-on project was recommended to focus on livestock within the farm system and market linkages. Anticipated environmental benefits include reduced soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways; improved nutrient management; economic benefits will improve income for farmers and other chain stakeholders, and society benefits will include improved gender and economic equity.

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