Country Snapshot: Vietnam

Vietnam, with a land area of close to 331,000 km^2, is home to 93.4 million people (2015 estimate, FAO, 2016). In 1990, the country's population was 69 million of which 80% lived in rural areas. Today, about 62 million (66.4%) live in rural areas.

Nevertheless, agriculture is a major contributor to the country's economy. In 2013, the country produced arable crops on 64,000 km^2, and permanent crops grew on 38,200 km^2. In other words, agriculture occupies about a third of the total land area in the country (FAO, 2016).

The commodities that drive Vietnam's agricultural economy come from both, field and tree crops. Rice, sugar cane and cassava were the leading crops in terms of production with approximately 45, 20, and 10 million tons, respectively, in 2014. This was followed by maize with about 5 million tons. Other important commodities include sweet potato, coconut, groundnut, potato, beans, soybean, coffee and cocoa (FAO, 2016).

In 1990, the agriculture value added per worker in Vietnam was about 440 USD (World Bank, 2016, data in constant 2010 U.S. dollars). In 2015 it is more than 800 USD, attesting to the tremendous growth in agricultural productivity. At the same time, the country has been able to increase forested area from about 93,000 km^2 in 1990 to more than 145,000 km^2 in 2013 (FAO, 2016), illustrating efforts to manage natural resources sustainably.

This focus on intensive, knowledge-based agriculture is underlined by the export trajectory of several key commodities. In 1990, about 1.6 million tons of rice was exported. That amount increased fivefold by 2012 to 8 million tons. Coffee exports in 1990 were less than 90,000 tons, but increased to 1.7 million tons in 2012. While there were no coconut exports in 1990, the country sold close to 150,000 tons in 2012 (FAO, 2016).

Internally, agricultural development was accompanied by improved supply of food protein to its population, which increased from 44 grams during 1990/92 to 76 grams per day and capita during 2009/11. This was likely driven by improved livestock production and aquaculture, both supported by adequate feedstock supply from agriculture (total meat production increased from 1 million tons in 1990 to 4.2 million tons in 2012, FAO, 2016).

An interesting aspect of Vietnamese agriculture is the fact that the achievements of intensified agricultural production were based on a relatively balanced composition in fertilizer nutrient consumption: According to FAO (2016), total N nutrient consumption was the same in 2002 and 2013. At the same time, consumption of P_2O_5 nutrients increased from about 510,000 tons to 644,000, and that of K_2O nutrients from 351,000 tons to 644,000 tons, leading to a K to N ratio of about 0.45 in 2013 (see 4R Nutrient Stewardship, IPNI 2012, for more information).

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