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Farmers' responses to VietGAP: a case study of a policy mechanism for transforming the traditional agri-food system in Vietnam

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Abstract

The VietGAP programme is one of a suite of policies used by the Vietnamese Government to transform the country into a more market-led economy. It was implemented in 2009 to help foster the development of a modern agri-food system in Vietnam. However, it has had limited success with less than 5% of farmers adopting the programme. Little is formally known about how the programme was implemented or why it was not adopted by the majority of farmers. This dissertation contributes to understanding farmers’ responses to VietGAP, a policy mechanism that is associated with an emerging socio-technical regime in the early stages of a transition to a modern agri-food system. A single-case study design was employed, and data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews supplemented with relevant documents. Qualitative data analysis techniques were used to analyse the interview data and relevant documents.

In this study, VietGAP was viewed as a policy mechanism used by the government to help it shift from a traditional to a modern agri-food system. Significantly, this study found that the social, cultural, and institutional dimensions that define the dominant traditional agri-food system determined farmers’ responses to VietGAP. Firstly, there was a lack of concern about food safety among value chain actors, particularly consumers and this limited demand for VietGAP-certified vegetables. Secondly, subjective rather than objective measures were used to assess vegetable quality by actors throughout the domestic vegetable value chain. Thirdly, the coordination of this vegetable value chain was dominated by informal, trust-based relationships between value chain actors rather than through formal written contracts.

In addition, farmers’ responses to VietGAP were influenced by the broader transition from a centrally planned to a more market-led system that is occurring in the country. The implementation of VietGAP changed the roles and nature of relationships between value chain actors and this influenced how farmers responded to VietGAP. This study highlights that farmers’ uptake of VietGAP requires changes to the socio-technical regime of the traditional agri-food system. Many farmers did not adopt VietGAP because of: 1) a lack of market demand for VietGAP-certified vegetables, 2) the risks associated with breaking informal institutions between farmers and preferred collectors; and 3) a lack of capability in key value chain actors. In contrast, a small number of
farmers adopted VietGAP because of: 1) the level of support they received from the local government; and 2) their political aspirations and loyalty to the government.

This research re-conceptualizes a public VietGAP scheme as a policy mechanism for transforming the traditional agri-food system in Vietnam. It provides insights into farmers’ responses to such policy mechanism and provides a more systemic view of the determinants of GAP adoption by producers. The insights gained from this study into what shaped farmers’ responses to VietGAP highlight areas that need to be considered when designing policies to enhance the uptake of public GAP programmes in developing countries that are in the early stages of a transition from a traditional to a modern agri-food system.
Acknowledgements

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPV</td>
<td>Communist Party of Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>Commune People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPCo</td>
<td>Commune People’s Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIEM</td>
<td>Central Institute for Economic Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDARD</td>
<td>District Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DERG</td>
<td>Development Economics Research Group,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSAE</td>
<td>District Station of Agricultural Exertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>District People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSM</td>
<td>Department of Survey and Mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPCo</td>
<td>District People’s Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>EurepGAP</td>
<td>European Retailer Produce Working Group Good Agricultural Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>Good Agricultural Practices</td>
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<td>Global Good Agricultural Practices</td>
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<td>GOV</td>
<td>Government of Vietnam</td>
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<td>GSO</td>
<td>General Statistics Office of Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARD</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOF</td>
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<td>MPI</td>
<td>Ministry of Planning and Investment</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>NCAE</td>
<td>National Centre for Agricultural Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDARD</td>
<td>Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
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<td>Provincial Centre for Agricultural Extension</td>
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<td>PPC</td>
<td>Provincial People’s Committee</td>
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<td>PPCo</td>
<td>Provincial People’s Council</td>
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<td>SCNA</td>
<td>Standing Committee of the National Assembly</td>
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<td>VietGAP</td>
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<td>VND</td>
<td>Vietnamese dong</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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