

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

DATE: WEDNESDAY 11 JANUARY 2012

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **TIA research making a difference in Vietnam**

The introduction of effective farming techniques is decreasing labour time and providing new opportunities for Vietnamese cattle farmers.

Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) and School of Agricultural Science researchers Assoc Prof Peter Lane and Dr David Parsons are undertaking a project in Vietnam to provide beef cattle farmers with improved techniques for sustainable production, supported by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

Dr Parsons said projects were running in three provinces in south-central coastal Vietnam, with 15 'case study' farmers in each province participating. The project aim is to increase the sustainability of cattle systems, and improve farmer livelihoods, through improved nutrition, better management and utilisation of existing resources. For example, growing improved forage crops for cattle can improve cattle nutrition and decrease labour requirements. However, Dr Parsons said they need to verify which techniques would work in each particular area.

"In improving cattle production in tropical areas in the world we can't assume what will be the best solution, but we can come up with a package of strategies and techniques we think can help, and then test them on-farm" he said.

This approach is tagged as "best bet research", applying the most likely successful practices, monitoring their success, and sharing results with other farmers.

"It's still a research project, not a large-scale development project," he said.

But they are hoping any successful techniques will be used by those involved and passed on to others by the farmers themselves and a network of extension workers.

"We're only working directly with a small number of farmers and so to increase the impact of the project we hold farmer group meetings and work with existing extension networks," Dr Parsons said.

Some of the techniques the team is training the farmers in relate to growing and managing improved forage plants. They have been planting tropical grasses and legumes including tree legumes, which are high in protein. This means the farmers no longer have to take the cattle to the communal ground to feed, reducing pressure on the environment.

Dr Parsons said farmers had reported that this was saving them two to three hours of labour each day.

“One farmer joked that now he could let his daughter get married because he didn’t need her help with the labour anymore,” he said.

They are also expecting improvements in the livelihoods of children as it is often they who are involved in watching the cattle. With less labour time, they are able to spend more time at school.

A side project has involved joining forces with Bruce Montgomery, a Tasmanian journalist who is one of the founders of the Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange Trust. The trust provides families with a cow, and Dr Parsons and his team have just started assisting by providing advice on the best way to care for the cows.

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