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Government of Vietnam awards Tasmanian scientists national medal

The Government of Vietnam has awarded a national honour to two University of Tasmania scientists, who have spent the past four years working with Vietnamese scientists, extension workers and farmers to alleviate poverty through sustainable agricultural development.

The Medal for Agriculture and Rural Development is one of the highest honours given to civilians in Vietnam and was presented to Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture's Associate Professor Peter Lane and Dr Stephen Ives for their research and development work with farmers in the northern mountainous provinces of Son La and Dien Bien where 75 per cent of families live in poverty.

Through the [Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research \(ACIAR\) funded project](#), they conducted technical and market research aimed at improving farmers' income from beef cattle.

The main challenge for this project was to investigate ways to overcome the shortage of feed for local cattle during the highlands' cold dry season," Associate Professor Lane said.

"Through collaboration with our in-country research partners we undertook on-farm trials of different grass species to test their suitability to this mountainous region of Vietnam.

"As well we investigated interactions between low temperature and the quality and quantity of feed provided to cattle to develop new strategies for feeding during the winter feed gap.

"Much of the success of our work was due to local extension workers and farmers, who were keen to learn about how to grow, harvest and manage new grass forages to supplement feed in winter."

The researchers also introduced a method of professional education on livestock production into village primary schools, identifying children as potential 'change agents'.

"There are low literacy levels among farmers, so children in these small village communities can help to disseminate new knowledge that they receive in school to the rest of the community," Dr Ives said.

"School children are the next generation of farmers and teaching them about new and innovative approaches to farming will have ongoing benefits."

The project is also improving linkages between farmers and buyers along the value chain, researching what characteristics consumers want in beef, improving the traceability of beef origin and raising the recognition of the quality of locally produced beef.

"Farmers will be able to negotiate the best price for their cattle by understanding how to produce better cattle for their market and through improved communication between the stakeholders along the value chain," Dr Ives said.

"One farmer, who refused the first offer from a cattle buyer, implemented the new feeding strategy (observed from his neighbour - a project farmer) and received a 30 per cent increase in price after only six weeks."

The TIA team working on the [ACIAR](#) Vietnamese project also includes Associate Professor Aduli Malau-Aduli, Associate Professor Laurie Bonney, Dr David Parsons and Dr Rowan Smith.

Farmer Profile

Mrs Lo Thi Mai, a widow with two young children in Dien Bien, owns 100m² of land, but her land is not large enough to grow sufficient rice to feed her family. As one of the poorer members of her village she is allowed to collect any left-overs after the harvest of rice and maize crops on other farms. She joined the beef cattle project two years ago and obtained a loan to buy a cow in calf. She was able to feed the cow and calf by growing forages on her land and collecting rice straw and maize crop residues from other farms in exchange for helping them harvest their crops. The cow has calved twice and the sale of the first calf has paid off her original loan. Mrs Mai is happy that she now has the potential to increase her income and escape from poverty whilst maintaining personal care of her children.

Photos available on request.

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