

Good Agricultural Practices for Vietnamese fresh fruit and vegetables producers – Process of development

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ABSTRACT

To overcome the food safety assurance disadvantages in its domestic and export markets, particularly since joining the WTO, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has decided to drive the development of a national Vietnam GAP system; called VietGAP. VietGAP is based on the ASEAN GAP model (www.aphnet.org) but was also designed to meet the specific needs of the Vietnamese fresh fruit and vegetables industry. VietGAP consists of twelve sections which covering practices for all four components including food safety, environmental management, worker health, safety and welfare, and produce quality. The practices in VietGAP are aimed at preventing and minimising hazards which would be occurred during food production chain including varieties, soil/media, fertilisers, chemicals, water, environmental impacts and workers and training. VietGAP will help Vietnamese growers, central markets and retailers to provide domestic and international customers and consumers with confidence in Vietnam's fresh produce. VietGAP was officially released on 28th January 2008 and is now co-operated in editing with the Canadian Food and Agricultural Product Quality Development and Control Project. VietGAP would be the successful key for the Vietnamese fruit and vegetable industries.

INTRODUCTION

In the horticulture industries Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) has become well established in the world, particularly in the European Union, USA, Chile, Australia, Japan and recently ASEAN. The Vietnamese horticultural industry is now facing more pressures from both domestic and international markets, particularly from the date joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) on 7th November 2006 because of its lack of a national GAP system.

1. **Domestic:** Nearly 23,000 Vietnamese were poisoned by foods including vegetable produce in the last four years (2001 – 2005) (Ministry of Health, 2006). Studies have found pesticide residues and other contaminants such as nitrates and heavy metals to be at levels well above Codex maximum residue limits (MRL). In peri-urban agricultural areas such as Thanh Tri, Hoang Mai in Hanoi and Cu Chi, Hoc Mon in Hochiminh cities where the majority of vegetables are produced the soil contamination and environmental pollution are becoming severe due to over-uses of fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture and toxic waste – mainly heavy metals – poured from industrial companies. A large number of overseas funded projects from

Australia (ACIAR, CARD) and Canada (CECI) have sought to introduce IPM and GAP to the Vietnamese horticultural industry. However Vietnam hasn't at present established yet a national GAP system for horticultural produce.

2. **International:** Exporting vegetables and fruit to overseas, particularly to China which has been a traditional market for Vietnamese vegetables and fruit, has dramatically fallen from US\$120.1 million in 2000 to US\$24.9 million in 2004 (Table 1). In 2000, 57% of Vietnamese exported vegetables and fruit went to China. In 2004 this fell to only 13%. Vietnamese experts believe this is a result of the Free-trade system of the Early Harvest Program of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area that China signed in 2003. China has substantially increased domestic production through major agricultural initiatives. Also, the preferences of Chinese consumers, particularly those in urban areas, have changed since China joined the WTO. Chinese consumers are seeking higher quality, clean and attractively packaged goods. Similar trends are occurring in the Vietnam domestic market as national wealth grows. China and other developing nations have responded to this need for assurances by accessing international standards and leveraging domestic governmental standards and control systems. Disaggregated Vietnamese horticulture industries have been slow to respond to these changing pressures and there is no national GAP system capability to drive and capture the improvements and assurances needed to compete in the new economic environment. Developing this capability is of greatly increased importance since Vietnam's WTO accession on 7th November 2006.

Table 1. Value of vegetable & fruit exports from Vietnam to China and Total value 2000-2004.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Export to China, US\$ million (% total export to China)	120.5 (57%)	142.0 (43%)	121.5 (56%)	67.1 (37%)	24.9 (13%)
Total export, US\$ million	213.1	329.9	218.5	182.5	186.8

The implementation of GAP programs currently within the ASEAN region varies, with some countries having government certified systems and others beginning the journey with awareness programs for growers⁽¹³⁾. In 2004 Australian government was asked by the ASEAN Secretariat to help in establishing a GAP program for ASEAN. Under a project funded by the ASEAN Australia Development Cooperation Program (Quality Assurance Systems for ASEAN Fruit and Vegetables Project; No. 37703), a standard for ASEAN GAP was developed to harmonize GAP Programs in the region. The goal is to facilitate trade between ASEAN countries and to global markets, improve viability for farmers, and help sustain a safe food supply and the environment. ASEAN GAP was officially released on 22nd November 2006 in Indonesia (www.aphnet.org)⁽²⁾. ASEAN GAP is an umbrella standard that individual ASEAN member countries will benchmark their national programs against to gain equivalence.

To overcome the food safety assurance disadvantages in its domestic and export markets, particularly since joining the WTO, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has decided to drive the development of a national Vietnam GAP system; called VietGAP, which is based on ASEAN GAP, for the Vietnamese fresh fruit and vegetable

industry to help growers, supermarkets and consumers. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Vietnamese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS) were nominated to develop a national GAP system for Vietnam.

SCOPE OF VietGAP

The Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practice for production of fresh fruit and vegetables is aimed at preventing or minimising the risk of hazards occurring during the production, harvesting and postharvest handling. The hazards covered in VietGAP include food safety, produce quality, environmental impacts and health, safety and welfare for Vietnamese workers (VietGAP).

DEVELOPMENT OF VietGAP

To develop VietGAP, a series of meetings and workshops were held in Hanoi involving representatives from project teams of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Department of Science and Technology, Department of Plant Protection, Department of Crop Production) and the Vietnamese Academy of Agricultural Sciences. The initial meetings focused on the translation of ASEAN GAP and experiences from implementing GAP programs in ASEAN (Malaysia⁽⁹⁾, Thailand⁽¹⁴⁾), EC⁽⁵⁾ and Australia^(3,12). Certified systems and guidelines for GAP from EUREPGAP⁽⁵⁾ and Freshcare⁽⁶⁾ were also reviewed. Subsequent meetings refined the standard practices which originated from ASEAN GAP to ensure that the recommended practices in VietGAP were relevant and achievable for all Vietnamese fresh fruit and vegetable growers, but consistent with previous GAP practices which were mainly based on EUREPGAP. The followed workshops will be involved in thoroughly discussions between project teams and Grower Associations and Supermarkets, to make sure VietGAP is for Vietnamese fresh fruit and vegetable growers, but consistent with ASEAN GAP and international GAP practices which were based on HACCP.

VietGAP covers practices for all 4 components including food safety, environmental management, worker health, safety and welfare, and produce quality. The practices in VietGAP have been divided into 12 sections including the Site assessment and selection, Planting material, Soil and substrates, Fertilisers and soil additives, Water, Chemicals, Harvesting and handling produce, Waste management and treatment, Workers and training, Documents, records, traceability and recall, Internal audit and Complaint and resolve complaint of fresh fruit and vegetables on farm. Guidelines for implementing VietGAP for Vietnamese fresh fruit, vegetables and tea producers are currently being developed to enhance the understanding of what is required to implement the agricultural good practices in Vietnam. Plan of VietGAP training courses are also being developed for master trainers for all provinces in Vietnam.

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