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Changing Crop Composition in the Vietnamese Upland during Economic Transformation: Impetus, Challenges and Solutions. A Case Study in Son La Province

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Abstract

This paper investigates the changes in crop composition: patterns, causes and challenges in the Son La province during economic innovation from 1989 — 2000. Son La is known as a mountainous province located in the Northwestern region of Vietnam, where agricultural sector accounts for 85 percent of total employment the province, and is the home of over 12 ethnic minorities with their own cultures, and agro-economic system. This period is divided into two sub-periods 1989–1994 and 1995–2000. This study uses data collected from different existing data sources at relevant local organizations.

The results of the study show that crop composition has changed rapidly after the Government of Vietnam decided to innovate the country's economy by transforming from central-planned economy to market-oriented economy. However, changing patterns of crop composition are quite different in two sub-periods. Three major trends of changing crop composition are identified (1) changes of crop groups — perennial crops vs. annual crops, and share of different subgroups of crop, (2) changes of crop varieties, especially HYV and (3) changes of number of crops per year.

These changes may be caused by two main groups of predominant factors:

1. Factors of internal economy. For example, consumption and market demands; development of production factors (human and production materials); and economic development strategies of the Central Government.
2. Factors of regional and world economies: the dissolution of Soviet Union and communist countries affected considerably to tea production in Son La province. A large area of tea was replaced by staple food crops and fruits.

The changes in crop composition are facing some challenges and conflicts. For example,

- Conflict between infrastructural investment and agricultural development;
- Conflict between technological application and education;
- Conflict between crop intensification, expansion and natural geophysical characteristics;
- Conflict between intensive crop cultivation and market development;
- Conflicts between economic development and conservation of traditional cultures.

Based on analyzing the status, causes and challenges of changes in crop composition in Son La province, seven (7) key solutions are recommended to enhance effectiveness of crop cultivation in the province.

Keywords: Agricultural innovation, economic transformation, market development, political innovation, Vietnam