

# Country Brief

## International Workshop on IPM and Marketing

**Country:** Lao PDR

**IPM Programme active since:** 1996, when Lao PDR joined FAO Regional Vegetable IPM Programme and began *rice-based IPM FFS training*. *Vegetable FFS training* since 1999.

**Estimated number of farmers trained:** 22,000

**Estimated number of trainers currently active:** 14

**Main crops involved:** Rice, cabbage, cucumber, tomato and yard-long bean.

### **Main issues/problems encountered with respect to marketing of IPM produce:**

- Low price and absence of market incentives because:
  - IPM produce is sometimes perceived by consumers as less attractive (lower 'cosmetic value') compared to those vegetables grown with high chemical sprays;
  - Supply exceeds demand as crops are grown without market forecast/market plan;
  - Most farmers do not have knowledge on post harvest technique nor facilities that could help them store and/or process their produce for better prices at later stage.

### **Brief description of marketing initiatives or strategies for IPM crops that have been developed and introduced:**

*Case Study: Off-season tomato production and protection work with Lao farmers in Vientiane Capital and Province from 2000 – 2003.* Lao farmers face serious bacterial wilt problems in tomato production during the wet season. Fresh tomato prices increase sharply as the wet season progresses. As Lao farmers are unable to produce and supply demand during the wet season, tomatoes are imported from Thailand. FAO supported the development of integrated disease management strategies for wet season tomato production within the context of IPM FFS training programmes. Links were made with the private sector (East West Seed) as to source the best varieties with highest level of BW tolerance. As a result, farmers became skilled in the production of wet season tomatoes and benefited from obtaining high farm gate prices and making handsome profits in the process.

**How long has the above marketing initiative/strategy been operational:** Actual project support 2000-2003. To date, as farmers continue to practice IPM and make optimal use of the latest Bacterial Wilt tolerant varieties, farmers continue to benefit from being able to produce and sell tomatoes at high prices during the wet season.,.

**How many farmers participate:** 23 farmer families.

### **How successful has it been (e.g. in terms of better prices for farmers, higher volumes sold, better market linkages, empowerment, etc):**

Given a high demand and high price of tomatoes during the rainy season, and given that only limited number of farmers could grow tomatoes in wet season, this off-season tomato work turned out to become a good technique in linking farmers to market as well as putting them in better position to negotiate for better price with middlemen.

### **What were the main obstacles, if any:**

- Small size of local market and unpromising markets for all other IPM produce, except off-season tomatoes, because consumers are not/less aware of pesticide risks and residues and still demand for good looking vegetables. This problem is particularly worse for farmers who do not have production and market plan.
- Consumers in urban areas, such as Vientiane, prefer the relatively cheap and good looking vegetable imports from Thailand.

### **Lessons learned from the marketing initiative/strategy and points that need further improvement:**

- Understanding of year-round developments in market prices and production planning by farmers vital for profitable fresh fruit and vegetable production.
- Identification of niche markets vital for facilitation of farmer access to markets and them benefiting from more rewarding market incentives.
- Lao fruit and vegetable farmers could benefit from cold storage and simple post-harvest and processing techniques so that they are not forced to sell produce at cheap farm gate prices.
- Explore collaboration with private and public sector projects that are involved in marketing of agriculture production starting from organizing farmer groups involved in IPM-FFS training.