

Agricultural and Rural Development in an Giang which Towards a Green and Sustainable Economy

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Abstract

Agriculture and rural areas play an important role in the economy and the stable development of society. Along with the country's innovation process after the mistakes and limitations of the planning mechanism and centralized subsidies, our country has entered a period of stability, development and integration with the world. An Giang is a key province in agricultural production in the Mekong Delta and the whole country. The achievements of the renovation process have promoted positivity and created personal motivation for people to promote creativity in agricultural production, contributing to raising and improving life, escaping the situation of food shortage, abandoned land and damaged agricultural tools. However, An Giang in particular and the Mekong Delta provinces in general are facing challenges due to climate change, water scarcity and saline intrusion, excessive crop growth, along with flood control dykes, has made the land inhospitable, excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has led to serious environmental pollution, ecosystem destruction, and biodiversity changes over hundreds of years, affecting people's health and causing many new diseases, especially cancer. Therefore, changing the way of production, following nature, towards ecological and sustainable agriculture for a clean environment and public health is an urgent issue that needs to be changed.

Keywords: Sustainable Agriculture, Climate Change, Innovation, Food Security, Rural Development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and rural areas are the important sectors of the economy. They play a very important role in the stability and economic development of each country. In our country today, agriculture, rural areas and farmers have a strategic position in the cause of industrialization, modernization, construction and protection of the Fatherland, are the basis and important force for sustainable socio-economic development, maintaining political stability, ensuring security and national defense, preserving and promote national cultural identity and protect the country's ecological environment.

After more than 35 years of implementing the renovation policy under the leadership of the Party, our country's agriculture and rural areas have achieved quite comprehensive and great achievements. Agriculture continues to develop at a fairly high speed in the direction of commodity production, improving productivity, quality and efficiency; firmly ensuring national food security; a number of export products occupy a high position in the world market.

An Giang is the headwater province of the Mekong Delta, which is one of the four provinces that form the key economic zone of the region along with three provinces and cities: Kien Giang, Ca Mau and Can Tho City. An Giang is a province with very favorable natural conditions for agricultural development, the province with the second largest food output in the region and the whole country, not only ensuring prosperity for the region and for export but also contributing to ensuring national food security.

However, like the whole country, An Giang's achievements are not commensurate with the potential and advantages of an agricultural province. Agricultural development is still unsustainable, the growth rate tends to decrease, competitiveness is low and resources for production development have not been well utilized; research, transfer of science and technology and human resource training are still limited. Economic restructuring and innovation in agricultural production methods are still slow, with small-scale, scattered production still prevalent; productivity, quality, and added value of many products are low. Industry, services, and occupations are developing slowly, not

strongly promoting economic and labor restructuring in rural areas. Forms of production organization are slow to innovate, not meeting the requirements of strong development of commodity production. Agriculture and rural development lack planning, technical infrastructure is still weak, the environment is increasingly polluted; the capacity to adapt and cope with natural disasters is still limited. The material and spiritual life of rural people is still low, the poverty rate is high, especially in ethnic minority and mountainous areas, the gap between rich and poor between rural and urban areas, and many pressing social issues arise. Therefore, developing An Giang's agriculture and rural areas towards a green and sustainable economy is an urgent and necessary task.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Achievements in Solving Agricultural and Rural Problems

Ten years before the renovation (1976 - 1985), An Giang's agriculture, farmers and rural areas faced many difficulties due to the need to focus on solving the serious consequences of the war on the southwestern border while worrying about economic development and political stability. During the period of the centrally planned and subsidized economy (1975 - 1986), the collectivization of land and agricultural machinery, the implementation of the encroachment reduction regime and the equalization of land population reduced the economic autonomy of farming households, so agricultural production developed slowly, land was abandoned, and agricultural machinery was severely damaged. People's lives faced many difficulties, famine often occurred, and the State had to provide relief every year, making the rural areas poor and backward.

After the Resolution of the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Directive 47-CT.TW dated August 31, 1988 of the Politburo, the 4th An Giang Provincial Party Congress (October 1986) seriously assessed the situation and proposed policies and solutions to focus on removing all obstacles, liberating production forces, developing the economy, and improving people's lives. In which agriculture and food were identified as the foundation and the leading front, farmers were the subject of the innovation process and rural areas were the strategic area. The policy of three rural areas (agriculture - farmers - rural areas) was born in accordance with the law and in accordance with the people's wishes. Since then, the farming household has been identified as an autonomous economic unit, land rights have been satisfactorily resolved between the old and new owners, the "cutting of encroachment" regime and the equalization of land population have been abolished. Farmers who have been given the right to use land have promoted dynamism and creativity and boldly invested in intensive cultivation to increase crop and livestock productivity. At the same time, compensation or return of agricultural machinery to the owner of the

machine that was previously requisitioned has been implemented.

Implementing the Resolution of the 11th Party Congress, the Resolution of the 9th An Giang Provincial Party Congress (2010-2015) advocated: "Comprehensive agricultural development towards large-scale production, comprehensively towards industrialization and modernization, in which forming specialized areas associated with the good implementation of the "Tam Nong" program, the roadmap for communes to meet new rural standards and effectively solving farmer and rural issues." (An Giang Provincial Party Committee, 2010, p.40).

The resolutions of the Party and the Provincial Party Committee were thoroughly disseminated to Party committees from the provincial to grassroots levels, in the political system and all Party members. Thereby, Party committees at all levels developed resolutions and specific action programs to synchronously resolve issues of agriculture, farmers and rural areas. The project "Strengthening the role and capacity of farmers in the period of industrialization and modernization of rural areas in the period of 2006-2010" of the Provincial People's Committee was approved by the Provincial People's Council in Resolution 34/2006/NQ-HDND.

The guiding viewpoint throughout is:

Agriculture is the foundation and the leading front, creating the premise and material basis for the development of industry, trade and services; gradually turning the province into a province with developed industry and agriculture.

Rural areas are strategic areas, rural development will directly impact production and people's lives. Farmers are a great revolutionary force in rural areas, creating essential products to meet the consumption needs of society and they are also the group that suffers many disadvantages in terms of material benefits in the market economy. Improve the material and spiritual life of farmers, implement policies to nurture people's strength for development.

With the above viewpoint, inheriting and promoting the three agriculture policies that have been effectively implemented for more than 35 years after the renovation. Agriculture, farmers and rural areas of the province have continuously developed and achieved remarkable results.

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After a period of extensive growth, from 2011 to the present, agriculture is gradually shifting from extensive to intensive production, initially stabilizing growth and producing quality goods through improving capacity, efficiency, and competitiveness. Production is based on the value chain that links to consumption. The

value chains of rice, vegetables and aquatic products have been formed and developed with increasingly diverse forms of production linkages in the chain such as horizontal linkages and vertical linkages, especially recently with the participation of banks. The implementation of the "large-scale field" model is becoming more substantial, selecting enterprises with good implementation capacity.

From the production of rice and aquatic varieties to the planning, harvesting, preserving, and processing of agricultural and aquatic products, the province has focused on investing in the application of scientific and technological research and advancements in agricultural production. High efficiency has been brought about by agricultural extension activities, and farmers are becoming more conscious of the need to use rice types that satisfy export requirements.

Especially in the trend of globalization, the province has also participated in responding to the government's project "Sustainable development of 1 million hectares of high-quality and low-emission rice cultivation associated with green growth in the Mekong Delta by 2030." The project is of particular importance in orienting the transformation of sustainable rice cultivation methods in the Mekong Delta and forming and developing large-scale, stable and long-term concentrated raw material areas, ensuring sustainable and effective farming quality. The project sets a target of reducing input costs by 30%, contributing to reducing rice production costs for farming households by about 9,500 billion VND; increasing the profit margin of rice growers by 50%; contributing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 10%. The project is associated with reorganizing the production system according to the value chain, applying sustainable farming processes to increase value, sustainable development of the rice industry, improving production and business efficiency, income and life of rice growers, protecting the environment, adapting to climate change, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to the implementation of Vietnam's international commitments.

***Achievements in Solving Rural Problems**

Implementing the Party's innovation policy, the Provincial Party Committee has advocated the development of industry and handicrafts. The multi-sector economic policy has brought about continuous development of industrial and handicraft production: industry and processing industry have developed rapidly. The agricultural, forestry and fishery processing industry has developed rapidly and stably. "The whole province has 545 industrial enterprises, including 419 processing and manufacturing enterprises and thousands of small-scale production establishments. The labor force in the industrial sector in 2018 was 61,110 people" (An Giang Provincial Party Committee, 2020, p.31).

In general, the average productivity of rice mills has increased by about 3 times compared to 2006. The quality of exported rice has become competitive in the region. The province's seafood and frozen vegetable processing factories have met international standards and are competitive in the market (including demanding markets such as the EU, US, Japan, etc.). Forestry processing has created many high-value products such as: boat building, civil carpentry, carving, etc.

Small-scale industries, rural industries, and traditional craft villages have been restored and continuously developed. To encourage the development of rural industries, restore and develop traditional craft villages, based on the policies of the Central Government, the Provincial People's Committee has issued many preferential policies such as supporting training, coaching, supporting credit capital for production and business activities and investment in new technology, supporting trademark registration, supporting investment in infrastructure for craft villages, etc. Thanks to that, rural industries have been maintained and developed stably. Currently, small-scale industrial establishments have focused on trademark registration and product quality.

In addition, the province has planned and is investing in the construction of 21 industrial and handicraft zones and clusters, with a total area of 890 hectares. Of which, there are 03 industrial zones managed by the province: 359 hectares (Binh Hoa Industrial Zone - Chau Thanh District, Binh Long Industrial Zone - Chau Phu District, Vam Cong Industrial Zone - Long Xuyen City) and 18 industrial and handicraft zones and clusters managed by the district with an area of 531 hectares. Many investors have registered to lease land to implement the project.

2.2. Challenges Facing the Province's Agriculture and Rural Areas in the Coming Time

Firstly, the means of production in agriculture and rural areas are declining and reaching their limit, especially land resources. The area of agricultural land is decreasing, and the quality of the land is deteriorating due to overexploitation and a high turnover rate. The increase in dike construction to 3 crops/year has reduced soil fertility, affecting the ability to develop sustainably, while the surplus food output sometimes remains for export. This affects income, health and especially the rural environment; water resources are also seriously affected, with the negative impact of depleting natural aquatic resources through the flood season that has existed for hundreds of years in the Mekong Delta. In addition to the declining quality of land, the water supply for agriculture is unstable due to climate change and saltwater intrusion into coastal plains. It is worth mentioning that, due to climate change, agricultural land in the Mekong Delta - the largest granary of rice, aquaculture and fruit trees in the country, which is at risk

of being seriously affected by rising sea levels intruding into the mainland, especially in coastal provinces. This will be a major challenge for our country's agricultural sector in the coming time.

Secondly, due to intensive farming, crop rotation, over-exploitation, and the impacts of the economic crisis and high oil prices, input costs in the agricultural sector are increasing, causing farmers' income to decrease. Previously, in the Mekong Delta, there were only two rice crops, Winter-Spring and Summer-Autumn, and during the flood season, water flooded the fields, cleaning them and bringing alluvium to enrich the soil. The living environment during the flood season was affected, so some organisms that are harmful to crops such as rats (which reproduce quickly and cause great damage to agriculture) did not have the conditions to reproduce. From these advantages, input costs for rice production in particular and other agricultural products in general are less expensive than they are today. On the contrary, since the intensive cultivation, the construction of dikes to prevent floods, the flood season is no longer, the land is poor in alluvium, the fields are not washed clean after two crops but have to increase the third crop (the autumn-winter crop), so to ensure high rice and agricultural product yields, farmers have to increase the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. And this increases input costs; farmers do 3 crops/year but still do not get rich. It can be said that with the current applied model, in the short and long term, farmers are still not the ones who benefit from agricultural production, but only those who trade in agricultural materials get rich quickly. Aside from the necessity to raise the quality of agricultural goods to match international standards throughout the integration era, the land is becoming more and more arid and losing quality, which has an impact on sustainable development. In our nation, farmers typically earn relatively little money. The goal of the state's temporary purchase policy is to guarantee farmers a 30% profit. However, not all farming households can achieve this profit if the quantity purchased for temporary storage is adequate, and the price is even lower during a high harvest, leaving farmers with a good harvest but low profits.

In addition, the implementation of WTO commitments also contributes to a relative reduction in the income of farming households producing agricultural products that are directly competing with imported products, especially products containing land advantages, which are not Vietnam's strengths. Therefore, it can be seen that: "low agricultural land area per capita with an abundant rural labor force, the continued expansion of agriculture will not create jobs with income" (Nguyen Thi To Quyen, 2012, p.232).

Thirdly, the competitive advantage in agriculture is decreasing, the market demand for quality

agricultural products is increasing (especially in developed countries such as the US and European countries), so with the current low quality of Vietnamese agricultural products, it is even more difficult to integrate today. Meanwhile, international commitments limit the ability to protect Vietnam's agricultural market. The market for low-priced agricultural products in the past will have little opportunity to expand (this can be easily seen in the variety of Vietnamese agricultural products that are difficult to penetrate into demanding markets). It can be seen that high prices and small-scale, fragmented production make agricultural products of poor quality, which is a factor that makes the agricultural industry unable to meet large orders. In order to reduce the amount of industrial food and food that does not guarantee food safety and hygiene and contains numerous harmful chemicals, many housewives in large cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have recently ordered clean food that is grown and raised in the provinces or in the suburbs. As a result, there is a high demand for clean food, not just for export, but also for domestic consumption. In order to meet domestic demand and export, the agricultural industry and farmers must strive to provide safe, hygienic, and high-quality agricultural goods. This can be regarded as an important need in the current integration phase.

Fourthly, from the viewpoint that rural areas are not only the residential areas of rural residents and agricultural production to ensure national food security but also undertake functions that cities and urban areas cannot fulfill, including the issues of environmental protection, conservation and exploitation of natural landscapes, historical relics, maintenance and balance of the ecological environment, traditional cultural heritages, and inherent humanistic values that have existed for thousands of years of the nation.

Fifthly, the increasing impact of weather and natural disasters (due to climate change, water scarcity and saltwater intrusion) and overexploitation of resources are likely to reduce food production, causing the risk of crop failure, especially in the two mountainous districts and towns of Tri Ton and Tinh Bien and places deep in the fields of level 3 and 4 canals.

2.3. Solutions for Agriculture and Rural Areas of the Province in the Coming Time

Firstly, agricultural and rural development in An Giang must always start from the actual conditions of the base and must be placed within the overall socio-economic development strategy of the province and the Mekong Delta. With very favorable natural and social conditions for agricultural production development. As the most populous province in the Mekong Delta with more than 70% of the population living in rural areas and mainly living on agricultural production. Therefore, the socio-economic development of the province must attach importance to industrialization, modernization of

agriculture and rural areas and synchronously solve the problems of agriculture, rural areas and farmers. Synchronously solving the problem of agriculture and rural areas will create a driving force for the socio-economic development of the province while gradually reducing the gap between rural and urban areas.

Secondly, agricultural and rural development must always be closely combined, unified and synchronized between agricultural development with the construction of new rural development and the improvement of the material and spiritual life and production capacity of farmers. It can be said that this is a principle that must be thoroughly understood in the process of synchronous development of agriculture, rural areas and farmers. Taking lightly any of the three elements above will greatly affect the effectiveness of the three rural policies. It is impossible to develop an agriculture that applies modern technology, ecological agriculture in a poor, backward rural society with weak infrastructure, a low intellectual level, and a low production level of rural people in general and farmers in particular and vice versa.

Thirdly, agricultural and rural development must ensure good service for the industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas and aim at the goal of building new rural areas.

To successfully industrialize and modernize the country in a country where the majority of people live on agriculture, industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas play an important role. Therefore, when solving the problem of agriculture, rural areas and farmers in implementing the policy of three rural areas, it is necessary to always contribute significantly to the industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas, aiming at the goal of building a large-scale, efficient, productive, high-quality and competitive agricultural production based on the application of advanced scientific and technological achievements to meet domestic and export needs. At the same time, building an increasingly rich, democratic, fair and civilized countryside with a reasonable economic structure, suitable production relations and increasingly modern infrastructure.

Fourthly, agricultural and rural development in An Giang must always originate from needs, ensure people's interests and aim for sustainable agricultural development.

One could argue that this serves as a lesson in rural and agricultural development. People's interests have not always been given the highest priority in some situations, locations, and eras. Farmers may have to endure long-term negative effects that they are unaware are mostly caused by ineffective development policies and mechanisms, even though short-term gains have

occasionally resulted in policies and strategies for agricultural and rural development that have produced short-term benefits. The traditional concepts of breadth and quantity have a strong hold on rural and agricultural development. Many industry officials, local officials, and even researchers believe that our country's agriculture and rural areas hold an important position in the national economy because the majority of the population today are farmers, living in rural areas and farmers' income mainly depends on agriculture. It is necessary to see that the role of agriculture and rural areas is reflected in the value that the agricultural sector contributes to the entire economy and the living standards of the people. Therefore, if we think in a classical way, it will lead to extensive development of agriculture, rural areas, and farmers without paying attention to investing in in-depth development and sustainable development on the basis of bringing the best benefits to the people.

CONCLUSION

One of the four provinces that make up the region's main economic zone is An Giang, which is the headwater province of the Mekong Delta. The province's natural environment is ideal for the growth of agriculture. However, An Giang was still a province that was experiencing starvation prior to the restoration period. An Giang has accomplished a lot during the period of renovation by putting the Party Central Committee's policy on agriculture, rural areas, and farmers into practice. This includes promoting structural transformation in agriculture, producing a wide variety of agricultural products, revitalizing the countryside, developing rural infrastructure, and greatly improving the lives of farmers. However, like the whole country, An Giang's achievements are not commensurate with the potential and advantages of a province with the most favorable natural and social conditions for agricultural production: agricultural production develops rapidly, but product quality is still limited, and the competitiveness of agricultural products is still low. Rural development is still spontaneous, not following planning and environmental protection. The material and spiritual life of farmers and rural residents has been improved, but most of them still face many difficulties. Therefore, in the coming years, the province needs to focus on implementing the policy that three rural areas must always closely combine, unify and synchronize agricultural development with the construction of new rural development and improve the material and spiritual life and production capacity of farmers. Agricultural and rural development must ensure good service for the process of industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas; must always originate from the needs, ensure the interests of the people and aim for a green, sustainable agriculture.

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