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Some Solutions To Promote The Development Of Ecological Agriculture In Vietnam At The Current Stage

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ABSTRACT
The concept of ecological agriculture (also known as agroecology) in Vietnam is relatively new. The issue of ecological agriculture has started to receive attention and development in recent years. Due to its young and fragile nature, ecological agriculture still faces challenges such as fragmentation, lack of value chain linkages, and the absence of ecological agricultural cooperatives or farmer groups. Ecological agriculture products lack clear criteria for easy identification by the public, and the branding has not been certified. Therefore, in the coming time, it is essential to intensify the development of ecological agriculture and organize production along value chains with integrated solutions.

Keywords: *Ecological agriculture, modern countryside, cultured farmers, agroecology*

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I. Introduction

As Vietnam is a traditional agricultural country with abundant potential and advantages in agricultural development, agriculture policies have always been highly regarded by the Vietnamese Communist Party. The Resolution No.7 of the 10th Central Committee has identified that "Agriculture, farmers, and rural areas have a strategic position in the cause of industrialization, modernization, construction, and defense of the country, serving as a foundation and an important force for sustainable socio-economic development, maintaining political stability, ensuring security and defense, preserving the cultural identity of the nation, and protecting the country's ecological environment." [2]

Until now, that spirit has been increasingly promoted, and agriculture has progressively affirmed its position and role in the socio-economic development of the country. Agricultural development policies have evolved through different stages of development. In the documents of the 13th Party Congress, the phrase "ecological agriculture, modern countryside, cultured farmers" appeared for the first time, reflecting the Party's innovative thinking in the development of agriculture, farmers, and rural areas. In this regard, "effectively implementing the restructuring of agriculture, developing agriculture, and rural economy in connection with building new rural areas in the direction of ecological agriculture, modern countryside, and cultured farmers" is highlighted [5].

There are various perspectives on ecological agriculture. Among them, the concept introduced by FAO in 2015 is the most widespread and endorsed by 175 member countries. According to this concept: "Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while also addressing the need for socially equitable and sustainable food systems" [4].

By the year 2019, the FAO Council had approved 10 elements of ecological agriculture, which include: diversity; knowledge sharing and co-creation; synergy; efficiency; renewability; resilience, humane social values; traditional cuisine and culture; responsible governance; and circular and resilient economy [4]. This approach does not exclude the application of appropriate cultivation methods or the use of modern science and technology in production.

It can be seen that, until now, ecological agriculture is the broadest and deepest concept of comprehensive and modern agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is synonymous with ecological agriculture, which is even considered the "soul" of sustainable agriculture. Ecological agriculture is a cultivation method that maximizes the use of available natural resources, applying ecological principles in the design of production systems to enhance ecological benefits (such as biological control, pollination, nutrient regeneration, soil and water protection, etc.)

at different scales, aiming to conserve and restore agricultural land. Ecological processes will be enhanced based on the application of science and technology. At the same time, the goal of ecological agriculture is to protect the environment and ecosystems; address social aspects effectively to achieve a sustainable and inclusive food and agriculture system [1].

Recently, ecological agriculture has been brought into discussions by international organizations and the United Nations as a strategic tool to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030, such as contributing to eradicating hunger and reducing poverty, ending food insecurity, achieving food security and improved nutrition, enhancing health and social welfare, and promoting sustainable employment. Therefore, ecological agriculture is increasingly asserting its important role.

II. Opportunities and challenges in developing ecological agriculture in the new context.

Opportunities

Firstly, throughout the development process, the Communist Party and the Vietnamese government have gained new insights into agricultural development, moving from expanding the scale to focusing on the depth of agriculture, promoting economic linkages, and advancing towards high-tech agriculture, green agriculture, and ecological agriculture.

Secondly, with such attention, Vietnam's economic scale has risen to 37th in the world, providing significant potential for overall economic development and, in particular, the development of ecological agriculture.

Thirdly, the like-a-storm development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has made significant progress in agricultural development with the application of high technology. Many scientific advancements have been applied, such as smart intelligence, new cultivation techniques, science and technology applications, new breeds, etc., all of which have increased the knowledge of farmers. Previously, there were very few businesses producing materials and supplies used in high-tech agriculture, but now there are many. These scientific advancements have resulted in many high-quality agricultural products that meet export standards. Currently, Vietnam has about 11 key agricultural export items, including rice, coffee, rubber, cashews, black pepper, tea, fruits, tra fish, shrimp, and wood products. Wood products alone are present in 150 countries and territories. Additionally, some aquaculture products have a competitive advantage in the global market, with an annual export value of over 1 billion USD, including rice, cashews, coffee, and tra fish [3].

Fourthly, many agricultural models aimed at developing ecological agriculture have emerged and are increasingly expanding in scale, such as the VAC model (garden-pond-cage), the rice-shrimp-fish model, the agroforestry model, the sustainable landscape agriculture model, the organic agriculture production model, the 4F system (farming, food, livestock, fertilizer) of biological safety farming, and agriculture combined with ecotourism. The success and expansion of these models are key to building and developing a nationwide ecological agriculture system.

Challenges:

However, despite achieving such results, bridging the gap between theory and practice and turning the Party's guidelines into reality still faces many challenges, difficulties, and limitations that create barriers to the development of ecological agriculture.

Firstly, agriculture and rural areas are developing fragmentedly, driven by short-term thinking, land grabbing, and speculative behavior. There is a lack of long-term vision in planning. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive strategic plan for the development of agriculture and rural areas.

Secondly, rural-urban migration is becoming increasingly common. Therefore, finding solutions for rural residents to stay and develop, creating livelihood opportunities in their homeland, is an urgent issue.

Thirdly, Vietnam's agricultural sector still lacks competitiveness compared to many neighboring countries in the region. Despite having strengths in various agricultural products and fruits, in the domestic market, many types of fruits and agricultural products from Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and China are widely available, and some even have a competitive advantage. Not to mention agricultural products from Japan, Australia, the United States, or European countries. This reality shows that, to some extent, many types of Vietnamese agricultural products are not competitive and appealing enough to domestic consumers, being "outperformed" on their own turf. Even with the ST25 rice, voted the best rice in the world, there are already 13-14 rice groups in Southeast Asia, including Cambodia and Thailand, that have achieved this title [3].

Fourthly, there are still many shortcomings and a lack of modern and synchronized infrastructure. Mobilizing resources to develop infrastructure remains insufficient and ineffective.

Fifthly, land resources are being wasted, and the environment, including soil, water, and air, is suffering from severe pollution. The excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers is still widespread. The level of expertise among farmers still faces many challenges. Additionally, the operation of agricultural cooperatives needs to change its methods and become more dynamic, and self-reliant. Agricultural businesses have not been

adequately encouraged and supported, even though economic linkages between businesses and farmers are the desired output for agricultural production.

Sixthly, the issue of seeking markets for Vietnamese agricultural products and advertising and promoting trade to enhance the competitiveness of domestic agricultural products does not match the potential and resources of the country. There are still many limitations and constraints in mechanisms and policies.

III. Suggestions for promoting the development of ecological agriculture in Vietnam at present

In the context of international economic integration and the current unpredictable changes in nature, Vietnam is striving towards a sustainable agricultural structure to develop ecological agriculture to improve the resilience of production systems in coping with climate change, ensuring food security, enhancing agricultural biodiversity, and adapting to changes in international trade. Therefore, in the coming time, Vietnam needs to accelerate the development of ecological agriculture with the following fundamental solutions:

Firstly, improve the policies aimed at developing a modern and effective ecological agriculture sector

To develop rural areas and ecological agriculture, a recurring issue is that during the development process, farmers move to urban areas, resulting in a shortage of labor resources. Without a labor force, there cannot be a thriving agricultural sector. Therefore, it is necessary to implement policies that encourage the children of landowners to return to farming and protect the rights and interests of farmers. Additionally, there should be supportive policies to facilitate the transition from traditional agriculture to ecological agriculture, such as providing initial production capital, establishing an ecosystem of services for ecological agriculture with the participation of agricultural extension services, offering training and knowledge programs for farmers, and implementing policies to support the provision of seeds, livestock, and breedings, as well as economic linkages. Furthermore, these policies should be tailored to specific circumstances and localities, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach.

Secondly, develop economic linkages in ecological agriculture along the value chain.

Improve policies that promote linkages in ecological agriculture production. There is a need to revise and enhance Government Decree No. 98/2018/NĐ-CP, dated May 7, 2018, regarding policies that encourage cooperative and linked development in agricultural production and consumption. Particularly, there should be supportive policies for households engaged in production linkages following the ecological agriculture model. Support businesses involved in the ecological agricultural value chain through preferential credit policies, tax incentives, training assistance, brand building, and product promotion. Research and develop programs to promote the consumption of ecological agricultural products and support promotion campaigns for these products, gradually moving towards establishing a brand for ecological agricultural products.

To attract consumer support for ecological agricultural products, in addition to evaluation criteria, it is essential to establish appropriate certifications for ecological agriculture. Furthermore, raise awareness among consumers and farmers about the role and benefits of ecological agriculture through various diverse communication channels.

Thirdly, promote innovation and creativity in agriculture.

Encourage research, development, and innovative application of improved varieties that are better adapted to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Emphasize the collection, conservation, and development of local plant and animal genetic resources through support for developing local varieties into specialty products, increasing the economic value of production, and fostering a strong connection between people and ecological agriculture. Implement policies and technical support programs to incentivize the adoption of more sustainable ecological production systems. Invest in production systems in challenging areas by integrating complementary industries such as preservation, primary processing, and manufacturing. Enhance the dissemination of new techniques combined with local knowledge to improve production efficiency while preserving traditional local experiences and techniques.

Fourthly, develop eco-agricultural tourism.

In the coming years, as the goal is to restructure the economy by increasing the share of services and gradually reducing the proportion of agriculture, the development of eco-agricultural tourism becomes a trend of the era, a prudent step that brings about dual effectiveness. Local authorities, especially the Departments of Tourism and Agriculture, should collaborate to build distinctive eco-agricultural tourism products. Simultaneously, establish promotion programs and partnerships with travel companies to create high-quality, diverse, and attractive tours and itineraries. Strengthen support for rural communities to engage in agricultural

and rural tourism through travel and hospitality businesses. As a result, an integrated economic sector can be formed, where agricultural products and rural characteristics become tourism resources.

Fifthly, develop a rural infrastructure planning strategy and diversify resources for eco-agricultural development.

Recognizing this as a breakthrough phase for development, it is crucial to establish policies and manage rural infrastructure resources effectively across different regions. Carefully select contractors and diversify investment resources from all economic sectors, social organizations, and individuals to foster eco-agricultural development. Encouragingly, prioritize attracting investments into rural infrastructure. Focus on investing in internal transportation infrastructure and connecting transportation between concentrated production areas with development spaces between regions and localities to promote value chain linkages. Additionally, the application of digital transformation is also one of the measures contributing to enhancing transparency in the eco-agricultural value chain.

IV. Conclusion:

Therefore, with the suggested solutions to enhance eco-agricultural development in Vietnam, especially the solution of developing economic linkages within the eco-agricultural value chain and building a rural infrastructure planning strategy to diversify resources for development, Vietnam is sure to seize the current opportunities and overcome existing difficulties and limitations. As a result, eco-agriculture will become an essential direction for sustainable agriculture in Vietnam, proactively coping with the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.

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