

Feeding and eating the socialist market economy: Changing patterns of food consumption and production in Vietnam and Laos

Arve Hansen, Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, arve.hansen@sum.uio.no

Robert Cole, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, coler@u.nus.edu

The parallel reform policies of Doi Moi in Vietnam and the New Economic Mechanism in Laos have brought about far-reaching social and economic transformations, with uneven but interrelated effects on food consumption and production in the two countries. While there may be many success stories in the transformation of food production and consumption in both countries, effects on domestic supply and food access have not always been positive, and the systems on which they rely are facing new sets of challenges and possibly new sets of reforms. Meanwhile, urban middle classes are rapidly expanding, particularly in Vietnam and to a growing extent in Laos. Their purchasing power and openness to foreign influences are changing food practices, simultaneously placing increasing demands on agriculture while Vietnamese and Lao cities are seen as promising markets for foreign retailing and brand food outlet corporations. While food security remains a worry among marginalized groups, food safety has emerged as a new concern for urban middle class households increasingly skeptical of the food they purchase.

How have food consumption and production patterns in Vietnam and Laos been shaped by their parallel market transitions? What kinds of new demand structures have emerged in this process, and how do these manifest in changes in food production practices? How do the “socialist” governments respond to new challenges of food security, food safety and malnutrition?

This panel invites papers with a focus on food production and/or consumption in Vietnam and Laos. Relevant topics include, but are not restricted to: Agrarian transformations in the context of the socialist market economy; changing diets and food practices among middle class and poor households; new (formal and informal) trade and production networks; changes in retailing and food services. Both single country cases and comparative studies are welcome.

Abstracts (max 200 words) can be sent to Arve Hansen (arve.hansen@sum.uio.no) or Robert Cole (coler@u.nus.edu).

Double session.