

Initial findings from the recent survey on the potential development of Eco-farming network among youths in the Mekong region

Written by Lê Hồng Giang, Oct 2013

Eco-farming practices lead towards a harmonious life between human and nature. This is the motivation of many people who are interested in alternative agriculture, especially applying eco-farming practices as part of life. The current survey conducted by Farmer Field School HEPA on the potential development of Eco-farming network among youths in Mekong region through the 'Mekong Youths Alliance for Organic Agriculture-Towards Organic Asia (TOA)' workshop has provided some findings:

Times that youth have engaged with eco-farming

The first factor we surveyed was about times that Mekong youths have engaged with farming activities, especially eco-farming. About 22.7 percent of the informants have involved for more than five years. About 50 percent shared that they have been active in eco-farming from one to three years. Only 9.1 percent have just been getting to know eco-farming in less than one year. These data suggest that youths in Mekong still care about farming, and increasingly are interested in eco-farming agriculture.

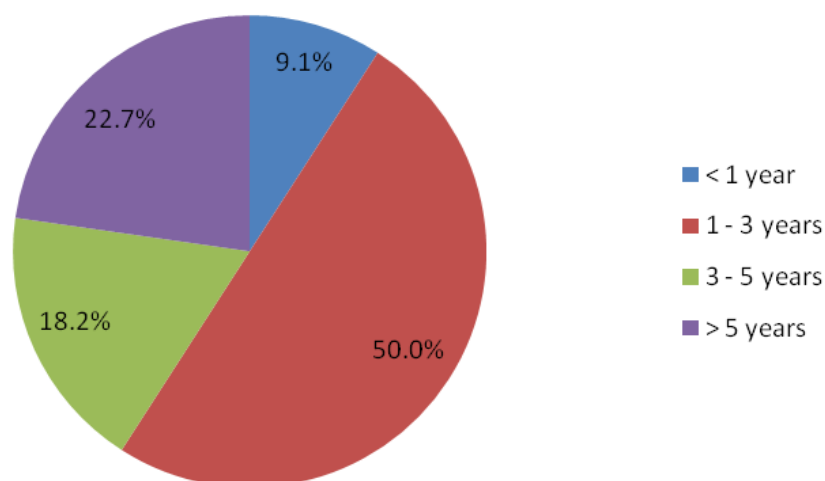


Figure 1: Times that youth have engaged with eco-farming activities.

Courses that youths have learned and the new courses in-demand

The second factor surveyed was about courses that youths have learned and the new courses that they wish to learn more. About 95 percent of the informants have studied and put into practices vegetable production using eco-farming approach. About 54 percent have practiced fruits production and 45.5 percent have designed their farms followed ecological criteria. These are the three most popular topics learned and practiced by informants. Large animals rising, despite an important component of farming life is though the topic with least preference only 9.1 percent.

For new courses, we still found a large group of people are interested in vegetable production by eco-farming process by 77.3 percent. Those who are interested in design method is about 72.7 percent and 68.2 percent wishing to learn grain-cropping. Interestingly the number of people wanting to learn large animals rising is increasing, about 31.8 percent. Other courses such as plant protection and farm record are emerging interests. These data, to an extent, suggest that eco-farming is a preferred practice in vegetable and fruits production, but is still limited in animals rising. It could be a challenge to source ecological materials to feed large animals in many rural and peripheral areas in the recent days. Nevertheless, if animals are fed by organic resources, this could ensure the food safety for many consumers. The increasing youths wanting to learn large animal rising, plant protection and farm record by ecological method would appear to indicate that eco-farming courses are becoming more important and offering useful skills towards a safer future.

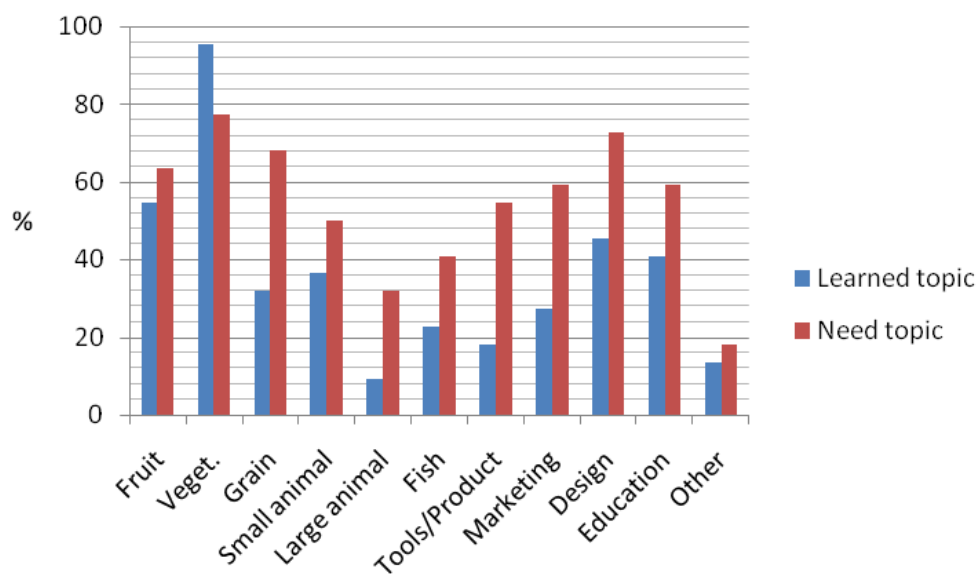


Figure 2: Courses that youths have learned and new courses in-demand.

Preferred duration of study

Regarding to the types of courses, 45.5 percent of the informants chose the intensive course (i.e. less than a month). Many of them also like short course (one to three months), about 27.3 percent. Very few of them, i.e. 13.6 percent, chose long course (more than six months).

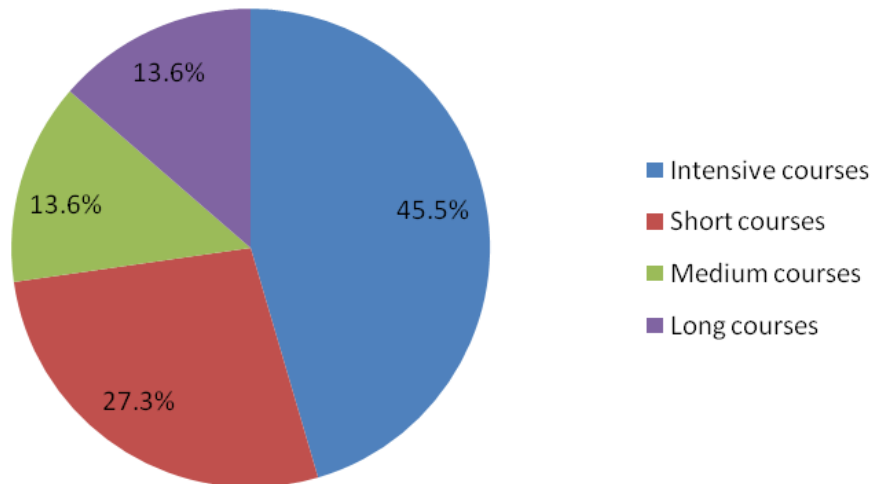


Figure 3: The preferred duration of study.

The best way to communicate and sharing about eco-farming

The third factor we surveyed was the best way to communicate and sharing about eco-farming. About 45.2 percent of the informants suggested that using network of small eco-farms or at household levels would be the best way to communicate in-action and share about eco-farming. Community gardens and city gardens were also considered, by 26.2 percent and 16.7 percent respectively. Big farms were considered less suitable.

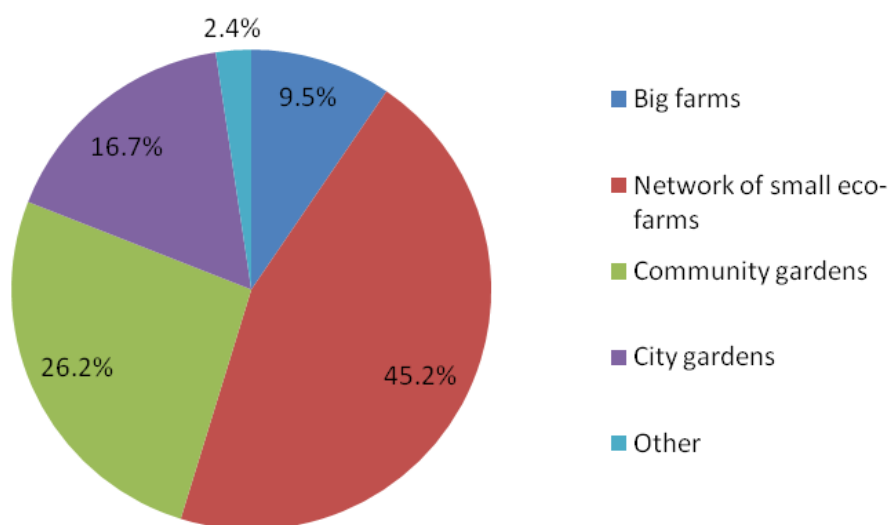


Figure 4: Ways to communicate and sharing about eco-farming.

About 64.9 percent of the informants experienced that sharing directly on the gardens, in the farms would be the most convenient approach. About 28.2 percent often communicate and sharing about eco-farming in community meetings. Only 18.8 percent used Internet for this but many informants also suggested that using Internet might be as the future communication strategy to further raise awareness on eco-farm in the region.

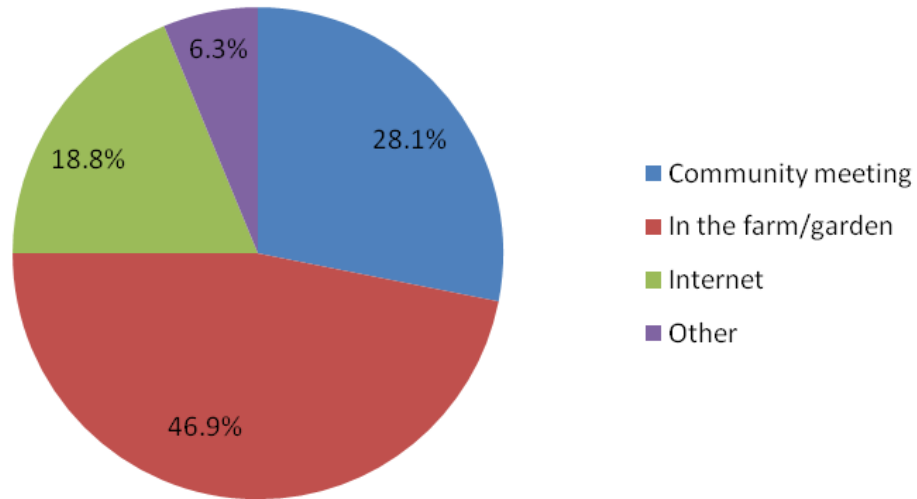


Figure 5: Ways to communicate and sharing about eco-farming in the region.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that interests in eco-farming have been increasingly taken up by the young generations in the Mekong region. Not only times that youths wishing to getting to know and putting into practices in farming activities, certain courses with underlining eco-farming principles were indicated high interests from the youths. Many of them seem to be very practical in terms of looking for doing eco-farming courses in the relatively short time i.e. less than a month. These findings offer some food-for-thought for the Farmers Field School at HEPA that: it might be a good idea to open up short courses (with specific farming skills) to interested people which could help to increase social awareness and better delivery of our educational and training services.