

# ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE : SOLUTION TO ADAPT TO AND REDUCE CLIMATE CHANGE

Today we are faced with climate change, ecological imbalance, and the situation of small-scale farmers losing control over food, losing of land, losing control over the price of their products, losing the right to keep seeds (seeds could not be kept because of the use of genetically modified varieties). Farmers are dependent on fertilizers and the market. All these problems drive small farmers into a cycle of debt with no way out, what is known as “sustainable debt”.



To solve the above problems, we invite small farmers in ethnic minority communities with whom we are accompanying to join the "eco-agriculture" campaign launched by Apex (Asian People's Exchange for Food Sovereignty & Agroecology) which is a regional exchange platform of farmers and NGOs in Asia forwarding agroecology and food sovereignty.

The campaign started with the training course "The role of small farmers in the world and in Vietnam in self-reliance in production and food security" held in Da Lat from 21 to 23 March 2023. Seven NGOs have joined this network, including Caritas of 3 dioceses: Da Lat, Phan Thiet, Long Xuyen.

The training showed us the important role farmers play in supplying the world with food, and at the same time, the meaning of food which is not only feeds people but also represents a culture, and the creativity of farmers.

It also showed us the dark side of the Green Revolution. This revolution saved the world from hunger, but it had enormous consequences. Farmers no longer have the right to choose varieties (due to the use of hybrids which need fertilizers and chemicals for high yields, crops are not strong enough to withstand the change of weather, cannot be left for the next crop. Traditional varieties are lost). The use of chemical fertilizers degrades the soil and unbalances the ecosystem (spraying inadvertently kills billions of beneficial microorganisms in the soil). Besides, with the trend of free market (self-regulating market, state does not intervene), people invest a lot but cannot control prices. Unstable market (farmers are pinched by private traders when borrowing money to invest) easily leads to loss of revenue and debt.

Faced with that situation, the best solution is to direct farmers to ecological agriculture. When doing ecological farming, it is necessary to adhere to 5 principles:

- Farmers are the center, all activities in production must aim at their interests.
- Use organic fertilizers instead of chemical fertilizers.
- Biodiversity instead of monoculture to balance the ecosystem in the soil, increase the health of the soil, make the soil capable of self-healing.
- Limit waste in the garden but use it for composting, thereby reducing input in production.
- Integrating science in ecological laws and with local knowledge of farmers.

Thus, ecological agriculture helps the soil to self-heal, which leads to the absence of the use of chemical drugs and fertilizers. It greatly contributes to the reduction of fossil fuel use and the reduction of climate change. Besides, it also ensures the food security of farmers (because in their garden there are many crops and livestock, farmers can provide food for themselves, even though there are fluctuations like the recent Covid pandemic, they still did not starve to death). Thus, farmers can be active in production, not be dependent on outside, debt will be reduced.



To convince and inspire farmers in doing ecological agriculture, we organized a tour of ecological models of forest gardens and Đon Dương organic vegetable cooperative. This is an opportunity for farmers to learn and share experiences with each other right in their fields. This inspires them a lot.

It is extremely difficult to change farmers' habits and awareness in production. But with the responsibility of a CND Sister, I see that it is the educational vocation to which the Lord calls

me in this day and age. The object of education is not students but small-scale farmers that we guide in the spirit of the General Chapter committed to the spirit of Laudato Si, especially in promoting the integral ecosystem.

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*Farmers are meeting to discuss the transition to eco-agriculture*



*The meeting between farmers of Caritas Long Xuyen and the sisters of the Vietnam Vicariate Council of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Da Lat, during a visit to the organic vegetable growing model. The sisters also encouraged farmers to be courageous in eco-agriculture.*