

Vietnam: Current Agriculture News and Issues

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Seafood exports to increase

Vietnam's Ministry of Fisheries is expecting that the country's seafood exports will increase in 2006, as the total area under aquaculture is expected to grow. However, fishery officials and industry observers caution that the Vietnamese fish and seafood sector will likely come under pressure due to strict food safety and hygiene regulations in other countries as well as due to anti-dumping lawsuits.

Officials with Vietnam's Ministry of Fisheries (MOF) anticipate that the country's seafood exports will reach a value of US \$2.8 billion in 2006, up more than five percent from the US \$2.65 billion exported in 2005. It is expected that the country will produce more than 3.4 million metric tons of fish and seafood products in 2006, of which nearly 2 million metric tons will be from the sea catch and the remaining 1.4 million metric tons will come from aquaculture facilities. In order to help Vietnam's seafood exporters reach the export goal set for 2006, MOF officials indicated that they will increase the total area dedicated to aquaculture facilities by 10 percent to reach 1.1 million hectares this year.

According to one of the country's leading fish and seafood industry organizations, the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers (VASEP), Vietnamese seafood producers will need to focus on improving the quality of its seafood products. This is mainly due to the fact that some of Vietnam's leading trade partners, including the European Union (EU), Japan, and the US are likely to introduce more stringent seafood regulations related to food safety and hygiene in 2006. In addition, industry observers indicate that the Vietnamese fish and seafood industry should also prepare for other challenges, such as anti-dumping lawsuits.

To help producers and exporters face these challenges, the Department for Management of Seafood Quality, Safety, and Hygiene within MOF plans to invest more than US \$400,000 in equipment to test for disease and pollution in order to improve Vietnamese seafood product quality. The equipment will primarily be used in the country's southern provinces, including An Giang, Can Tho, Dong Thap, Kien Giang and Tra Vinh, and will likely be in use for two years beginning in 2006.

Meanwhile, Vietnamese seafood producers are anticipating that domestic seafood sales for the month of January 2006 will increase by roughly 20 percent. Industry observers attribute the increase to the Vietnamese Lunar New Year Holiday, Tet, that takes place at the end of January and a decrease in demand for poultry products due to the bird flu virus.

SOURCES: Asia Pulse, Thai News Service, Vietnam News Agency Bulletin, and Vietnam News Brief Service

