

**Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center**

**Aquaculture Department**

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Journals/Magazines

Aqua Farm News

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# The Asian farmer

Aquaculture Department, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

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Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Aquaculture Department (1993). The Asian farmer. Aqua Farm News, 11(1), 3.

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## The Asian farmer

A typical Asian farmer lives with his wife and four children on a farm of approximately 1.5 ha and raises mainly rice. The family owns one or two work animals and raises several chickens and ducks. Land tenure and ownership or tenancy arrangements are variable. There may be several enterprises of varying importance:

- Wet rice, almost always present on farms in tropical Asia and often the principal feature of the farm;
- Multiple cropping of other annual crops with rice in the paddy fields;
- Permanent cultivation of annual or perennial crops, including staple roots and tubers on dry land (upland);
- A mixed garden around the farmstead where fruits, vegetables, and root crops are grown; and
- Livestock, cattle, or buffaloes kept mainly for work, and scavenging poultry and/or pigs.

In Asia as in Europe, there is a tendency for mixed gardening to occupy an increasing proportion of the total arable land on the farm. This can evolve into market gardening and the growing of vegetables for sale. This is seen as a response to increasing population density, particularly near urban areas.

Farming throughout the humid tropics is characterized by the neglect of livestock productivity. Most of the livestock in Southeast Asia are raised on small-scale farms rather than in commercial operations. Buffaloes and cattle are raised primarily as work animals although they are slaughtered when their working days are over. During the rice growing season, the buffaloes and cattle subsist on rough grass of poor quality; after harvest, they graze on straw in the paddy

fields. Cattle raising for dairy purposes is traditional in the Indian subcontinent but not in Southeast Asia, although there is now increasing interest in dairying among small-scale farmers in the latter region.

Fish culture, contrary to popular belief, is not at all widespread in tropical Asia. Farmers have captured wild fish from rice fields since time immemorial but it has been estimated that less than 1% of the irrigated ricefields in Southeast Asia are used to culture fish. Little has changed since this estimate. There are a few traditional aquaculture systems in tropical Asia, for example, the polyculture system for Indian major carps. However, until recently, this was not an example of integrated farming because it was extensive with no fertilizer or feed inputs. Overseas Chinese were largely responsible for importing integrated fish farming technology to Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and perhaps Indonesia. There has been significant development of integrated crop-livestock-fish farming in tropical Asia over the past 20-30 years but it still probably involves less than 1% of the small-scale farmers in the region.

Chinese farmers in Malaysia and elsewhere are involved in more intensive cultivation of crops and livestock and sometimes fish. The livestock, mainly pigs, are well integrated into the farming system -- they are fed mainly cassava and crop residues such as waste vegetables and rice by-products and their manure is applied either to crops or to fishponds. However, most small-scale farming in Asia may be characterized as settled agriculture with plant crops dominant and not integrated with livestock or fish.

Source: P Edwards, RSV Pullin, JA Gartner. 1988. *Research and education for the development of integrated crop-livestock-fish farming systems in the tropics*. International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management. Manila, Philippines. p. 9-10.