

LINKAGES OF OFF-FARM ACTIVITIES

In the context of Mianchi, the linkages of off-farm activities with the farming system are more relevant and important.

Vegetable cultivation has enhanced land use, but it has also brought about some negative effects. Apart from capsicum, all the other vegetables, such as garlic bolt and radishes, are interplanted with crops such as maize, wheat, or beans. This has increased the multiple crop index of cultivated land. For example, irrigated lands in the villages of both Shanguanmiao and Mianfong, have a multiple crop index of over 300 per cent, double the township average. At the same time, negative effects are also becoming apparent. For example, the soil fertility of some lands in both Shanguanmiao and Mianfong villages are beginning to show a decline in productivity, thus needing more fertilizer to make up for the loss.

The most obvious linkage is the one between livestock and cropping. On the one hand, livestock provide manure and draft power for cropping and, on the other, crops provide fodder for livestock. In all nine villages, livestock are an important source of manure. Draft power is of singular relevance to a lot of farming activities and can hardly be replaced by other forms of power in the near future.

Because of the higher output-input rate of off-farm activities, most of the younger generation are reluctant to carry out farm activities. According to the household survey, middle-aged men and women are the major force in farming in a large number of households. The skills of most of the young people are believed to be poorer. Local leaders are afraid that the cropping system will be seriously affected when the present middle-aged generation retires from farming.

Successful linkages among agriculture and off-farm activities are exemplified in some households. In the Xong family there are four economically active persons: Xong Shouchang-head of the family (A), his wife-Liu Guiying (B), his son-Xong Touming (C), and his son's wife-Chai Xiuning (D). The main activities in this household include catering services, pig-raising, vegetable cultivation, and crop farming. The linkages established among these activities are shown in Figure 1.

Vegetable and fruit production also introduce activities related to transportation, storage, and processing. However, in the case of Mianchi, these linkages have not become apparent as yet. With the growth in horticultural production in the future (as more orchards begin to bear fruit) these linkages will become obvious.

Figure 1

