

Session III – Connecting People and the Ecosystems That Support Them
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Effects of Economic Crisis on Shrimp Producers in the Mississippi and Mekong Deltas

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Abstract

The development and expansion of shrimp aquaculture in many countries has caused a major increase in production and decline in prices. Shrimp producers in the Mississippi delta began to experience a serious economic crisis in 2001 due to low shrimp prices. Thousands of fishermen were forced from the fishery and severe damage was done to many communities in the Mississippi delta. The crisis also led to an anti-dumping lawsuit against Vietnam and five other exporting countries which has not markedly increased prices nor reduced imports to the U.S.

While producers in Vietnam's Mekong delta embraced shrimp farming in 2000, and largely improved their livelihoods, in 2008 the fall in prices combined with input cost increases caused the Mekong delta's shrimp sector to go into crisis. Some producers are diversifying, others returning to other farming systems, but most are extensifying their production and hoping prices will improve.

Qualitative data collected with shrimp producers in Ca Mau and Soc Trang provinces shows that the economics and agro-ecologies of Mekong delta shrimp farming are undergoing rapid change. Most producers cannot back out of aquaculture due to land salinization. Farmers in fresher-water areas can more readily change. Adoption of *vannamei* shrimp or higher intensity of culture is infeasible for the majority of producers due to its cost. The Vietnamese State's program of 'Linking the Four Houses' and associated international efforts to support the sector do not sufficiently address the needs of most producers, who follow extensive or improved extensive production, particularly in crafting brackish-water farming systems, in fostering greater producer power in the market through collective action, or addressing the fall in international shrimp prices which is impoverishing producers globally. On this point, Mississippi and Mekong delta shrimpers face a common problem and cooperative, not antagonistic, action on international commodity markets is recommended.