



Pickled cabbage soup, pork, tofu and salad for dinner in Mr L. and Mrs T.'s household. Photo: VietSurvey

WHAT ARE PEOPLE EATING?

Views from *Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility*

Mr L. and Mrs T., Hanoi, Vietnam, 2013

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This case study is one of several produced to accompany *Help Yourself!*, the second year synthesis report from the *Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility* research project. Other case studies, country reports, synthesis reports, and further information about the project can be found at www.oxfam.org.uk/foodprices



Mr L., who is 51 years old, is blind and unable to work. He lives with his wife, Mrs T., and their 17-year-old son. Mrs T. sells drinks and soups at the local market. Their ward, Quynh Mai, has one of the highest poverty rates in Hanoi. Most people in Quynh Mai, many of whom are migrants, work in the textile and garment industries.

Mr L. gets what he calls a 'subsidy', amounting to VND 350,000 (£10) from the commune's People's Committee every month. He and his family are not categorized as being a 'poor household', but as a 'household in difficulty' which means they are not eligible for support from the local government. Instead, they only receive small gifts around the Tet holiday to the value of VND 400,000 (£11). In Vietnam in 2012 there was no clear pattern in food price changes. Prices were high but fluctuating, and some staple and high-value items dropped in price, while others rose. In 2013, as rice production was expected to reach a record level, wholesale and retail prices remained relatively stable throughout the year. Towards the end of 2013, there were modest increases, reflecting increased demand from China and the Philippines. However, many respondents pointed to increases in vegetables and meat prices.

Mrs T. explains that some food prices, vegetables in particular, are double the price of last year. She attributes it to bad weather. Because of the rising prices, Mr L. says that the quality of his family's daily meals has decreased.

Mr L. explains that his family meals revolve around two main dishes: fish and vegetables or meat and vegetables. When his wife does not sell some of her soups they have leftovers for dinner. When asked if they ever consume beef or chicken, they explain that a chicken costs VND 300,000 (£8.25) and so they only ever have it for special occasions.

Mrs T. explains that when the price of vegetables goes up, she has to make her soups with less. She tells us that if she increased her prices, no one would buy from her. She sells *chè* (a sweet soup made from many kind of beans), *phở* (rice noodle soup) and *congee* (rice porridge). To prepare *congee*, she wakes up at 2.30am.

Mr L. and Mrs T.'s meals are similar to those in other households visited in Hanoi and the other sites in Vietnam, as most households explained they had little diversity in their diets and eat very simple food. In particular, food affordability puts pressure on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including poor households, disabled people and elders with ineffective support. Peanuts and tofu often replace meat in an attempt to reduce food expenses. Other changes include eating at home or replacing more preferred foods with less preferred foods, cutting down on quality and luxury items, and making do with less.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail research@oxfam.org.uk

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