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“Challenges to Organic Farming and Sustainable Land Use  
in the Tropics and Subtropics”

**Land Use and Household Economy in H´mong Mountainous  
Farming Systems in Vietnam — the Case of Mai Son District**

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**Abstract**

The development of farming and forestry based systems in the mountainous regions of Northern Vietnam lead to an extension of the agricultural land to the detriment of forest area and the environment (DOPPLER, 1999). In addition, increasing population pressure and non-adapted land use practices lead to land degradation, which threatens the future food and income security of the population in this area. To overcome these problems, a shift towards more sustainable land use and stability living standards is required. A representative sample of 50 H´mong families and 25 black Thai families builds the basis for analysis designed to: investigate land resource availability under its capacity and the potential of management and exposure to resource overuse and its specific features; understand and explain the relationship between availability and utility of land, compare living standards of families; develop and simulate future development of sustainable land use in the mountainous farming systems. There are significant differences of the total average area per farm between H´mong villages (ranges from 2.09 ha to 2.88 ha) and black Thai village (3.65 ha). Most of H´mong land is sloping (250 to 450). Thus, easily eroded and degraded. Typical features of H´mong farming systems are: Mono culture with short fallow even without fallow or crop rotations; only maize, cassava and upland rice are grown; low input and land use efficiency. Family income/year of H´mong farmer (from 80 to 125 US\$) is nearly half of that of black Thai farmers. Most of this income comes from farm activities. It is still less than income of the farmers in red river delta from the year 1998. The H´mong farmers start from very difficult conditions (little land, degradation problems, poor infrastructure, far away from the market) than the black Thai, therefore their living standard is still lower than the other in this mountainous area, and an optimal strategy for sustainable management and use of land to improve farmers' living standard on the level of farming systems is expected to be identified.

**Keywords:** Farming system, land use, Vietnam