



HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

Thach Phuoc Hung

A Farmer's Quest for Success

A Vietnamese farmer uses the Academy as he strives to expand his business and become a top supplier

As a farmer, Hung, short for Thach Phuoc Hung, works hard to manage the five hectares of farmland outside of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) that belongs to his parents and sister. The farm grows rice and vegetables and supplies produce to local markets and shops in the HCMC area.

Originally from Tra Vinh province in southern Vietnam, Hung, who has just recently completed his education and married, now lives in HCMC. He decided to help his sister. "When I graduated with a master's degree in public policy about 10 months ago," Hung says, "I decided immediately to help my sister manage the farm."

The farm is located about a three-hour drive from HCMC. Hung goes early in the morning to the farm to check on the crops and works until late at night to deliver his produce. "We supply local markets and stores with a variety of vegetables we plant at our farm, ranging from morning glory to onions and more traditional Vietnamese vegetable varieties such as rau quế (sweet basil) and cai (cabbage) in addition to rice," explains Hung. "We supply the produce to a regular list of customers on a daily basis."

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When delivering his produce to his customers, Hung remains aware of what their competitors are doing. “We must keep up with what produce other farms supply their customers with if we want to be successful,” he says. “We do this by regularly researching the market, as well as doing research in the community about their preferences.” Hung also observes that word of mouth plays a very important part in selling his farm’s produce.

Hung relies heavily on weather forecasts to make sure that he is getting the best crops from his farm. “While Vietnam only has two seasons, dry and rainy,” Hung explains, “crops depend heavily on the weather.” Sometimes, despite the weather conditions, some customers demand a certain price for the produce, and they try to find suppliers that are willing to meet their demands. “That’s why, being a farmer, the customer-supplier relationship is very important to me,” Hung notes. He has even fostered some long-time relations with customers dating back to the time when his sister still managed the farm. “We usually go to the wholesale market, where you will meet people; this is how you built a reputation,” he explains.

While keeping the old customers is necessary, Hung realizes that he must also cultivate more new customers because he can’t rely only on the existing ones if he wants to successfully manage the farm. “Adding new customers means added revenue, and added revenue means profit, which is necessary for the farm to survive,” he explains. Not only that, Hung wants to become a top supplier in the country. “Success to me is when we are able to become one of the biggest suppliers,” he says. “At least in the top five.”

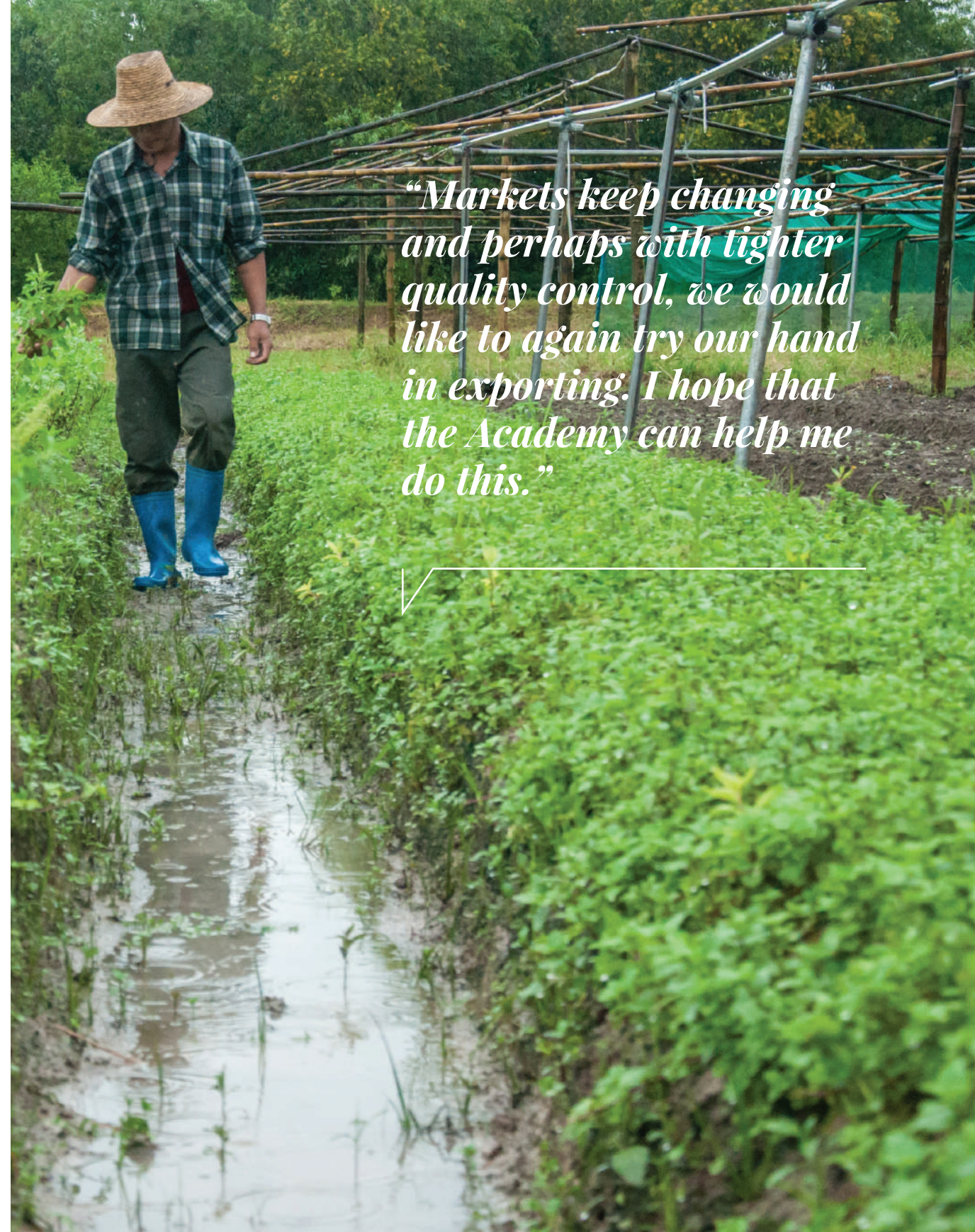
It was during his master’s program that Hung became classmates with Uyen, an Academy Facilitator who spoke to him about the Academy. Looking at the Academy, Hung is focusing on its course in management and strategic planning. “I think these courses would help me a lot in managing our farm effectively,” he says.

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Hung notes that the fact that the platform is only in English might be an issue for many other small business owners in Vietnam. “English is one of the biggest obstacles for business owners in Vietnam,” he admits. “Especially for people who did not get a higher education, it will be hard to understand.” In general however, Hung thinks that the Academy is quite user-friendly. “The examples in the courses are quite easy to understand,” he adds. “While I wanted to take courses previously, I have just recently been able to start taking a management course on the Academy,” Hung says a bit embarrassed. “It is not too late, I hope..? There’s just so much to cover.”

Hung also thinks that the Academy can help him land more steady customers and hopefully also sell to even more stores and other outlets. “We have started exporting around five years ago to places like Dubai and some other places in Europe, actually. But it didn’t do well and we had to stop in the end,” he remembers. “Markets keep changing and perhaps with tighter quality control, we would like to again try our hand in exporting. I hope that the Academy can help me do this.”



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