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A wooden boat with its open hold full of tan husked coconuts is moored on the Mekong River near Mytho. This cargo of coconuts is likely headed for processing as copra, the dried meat from inside a coconut shell. Plantations in Vietnam now yield approximately 700 million coconuts a year, much of that harvest exported. When a coconut is young, the juice and cream inside can be used for drinking and cooking. When the coconut is older, the meat is dried for oil or use in a variety of other processed food products. Coconut fiber and shells also have market value to make ropes, charcoal, and handicrafts. The Mekong River flows approximately 2,800 miles from the high plateaus of Tibet to the fertile delta regions now within southern Vietnam and Cambodia. The rich river delta soils allow up to three crops of rice per year and form the major food-producing regions of both countries. Almost 2/3 of Vietnam's food supply is grown in the Mekong delta area southeast of Ho Chi Minh City. The waterways of the Mekong are the region's primary conduit for local trade and transportation.



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