



Rural Training Center-Thailand (RTC-TH)

Dec 2006 RTC-TH Update

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Community-based Environmental Education for the Self-Sufficiency and Sustainability of Small Rural Family Farms

Winter 2007 REEEPP Team Ready to Go

Initially, about 46 people expressed interest in the January volunteer trip. This narrowed down to about 12 people keen on going. As the project application deadline approached, the Winter 2007 Rural Environmental Education Enhancement Pilot Program (REEEPP) Team composition was finalized at 7 people: Andrew Arboleda, Tuyen La, Gregory Lee, Saifon Lee, Erika Rodriguez, Robert Rodriguez, and Margarita Rodriguez (a new RTC-TH volunteer). Potential volunteers were beset with scheduling problems and limited funds. When you consider the RTC-TH is an all volunteer effort where no one receives a stipend or salary and everyone pays their own way, the nearly 86% return volunteer rate is a pleasant surprise and adds a tremendous amount of continuity to the REEEPP effort.

This year REEEPP will focus on English language learning, specifically speaking and listening. The training will reinforce the ongoing Green School, Habitat, and NASA CERES S'COOL projects while integrating English speaking and listening with those projects. A special effort will be made to use photography and PowerPoint presentations while creating basic vocabulary lessons similar to last summer's "What I Do Before Going to School." Teachers will also be given more hands on in weather observations and NASA CERES S'COOL procedures. "All studies are similar in that if you don't use what you learn, you soon lose it," sated Greg Lee. "So the smart thing to do is to carefully observe the students and the teachers and see what they enjoy doing, then adapt the lessons to the conditions in the school to help make learning more enjoyable. When they are comfortable and enjoy learning, they will do the activities and practice more often. That leads to reinforcement and helps improve learning."



Saifon Lee ☯ Gregory Lee ☯



Erika Rodriguez ☯



Andrew Arboleda ☯



Robert Rodriguez ☯



Tuyen La ☯



Margarita Rodriguez

☯ Indicates a previous volunteer in Summer 2005 REEEPP

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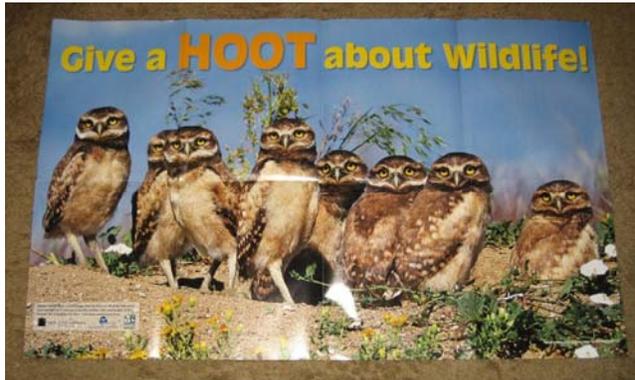
National Wildlife Federation Project Support

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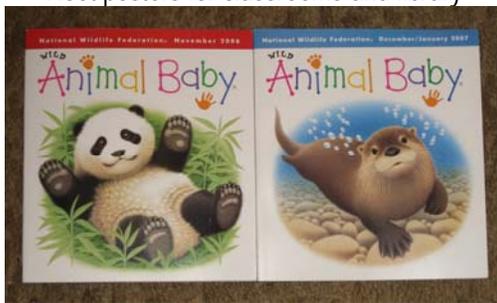


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NWF Continues REEEPP Support



Hoot posters for classrooms and library



Wild Animal Baby magazines for the library



Ball point pens and stickers for students



NWF logo backpacks and work pouch for the Thai staff

For the third consecutive year, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) continued its active support for the REEEPP effort at Ban Na Fa Elementary School. Melinda Hughes, NWF Volunteer Coordinator has been instrumental in maintaining a strong NWF presence in the project.

This year, the NWF provided HOOT posters for each of the classrooms and library, NWF ball point pens (made with recycled materials) and Ranger Rick stickers for the students, and NWF logo backpacks and work pouches for the Ban Na Fa Elementary School teachers / staff and the RTC-TH volunteer staff. (The work pouches came from the ESSI NWF Habitat Steward training program.)

These incentive awards are just one way to keep people motivated in the project. "We are grateful for the NWF support," says Saifon. Everyone works hard for no pay. It truly comes from the heart, mind, and soul. But with the NWF help, we can give some tangible reward to the participants as a symbolic token to acknowledge them."

"Everyone likes to feel special," commented Greg Lee. "An NWF ball point pen is especially unique in rural Thailand. And to top it all off, it is made using recycled materials! This makes it so consistent with the Green School lessons we have at the school. It sends a very positive and consistent message to the students, parents, and community."

"Children love stickers, and I am hoping the environmental lessons and messages will also stick in their minds," chuckled Greg.

Positive energy is definitely in the air and is something common to all RTC-TH activities. Continued thanks to Melinda and all the NWF folks for their support!☺



RTC-TH Demo Farm News

Rice Harvest Done

We recently received photos from Thailand of the rice harvest at the farm. We have yet to receive the complete report and statistics. The RTC-TH farm staff is rather busy with the farm work and will have to catch up on the reporting later, but other volunteers were able to get these photos e-mailed to us.

Sticky rice is the staple crop for northern Thais. In earlier times, the success of a family farm was measured by the rice harvest. If you owned enough land to plant and harvest enough rice to feed the family for a year, you were considered a success. Machinery is usually hired, with some workers, but many times family members must pitch in.

The harvest begins with draining the rice paddy and letting it dry out. Then the rice is cut and set to dry. The dried stalks are then threshed to separate the rice grains from the stalks and chaff. The rice grains are collected and bagged. The chaff and stalks are gathered for use as cooking fuel, animal feed, or mulch / compost.

Polishing the rice is the final step before storage. Some farmers leave the husks at the mill as part of the service fee. The mill owners use it to mix and sell livestock feed. Others pay for the service retrieve the husks for use it on their farm as livestock feed supplement. Rice husks can also be burned to help cure newly made bricks. Of course, composting is a good option. ☺



RTC-TH Farm Manager Aoi with her son, Net.



Previously cut and dried rice is put into the thresher.



Rice grains collected for people, stalks and chaff for animals.





Piglets sold off to reduce off-farm feed expenses



Sows are held in reserve until the new program is implemented



A "total" integrated system networking family members from farm to market is being discussed and developed

Pig Profits on Pause

The farm is in transition from semi-commercial operations to a more self-sufficient mode. Progress on the pig sales have slowed considerably in the last month. While market prices increased for meat, other price increases in fuel and feed took their toll on the pig profits. All of this points out the elusive profits for small family farms. The Fall floods created food shortages that drove food prices up. But flood damage to bridges and roads limited trucking shipments and rising fuel prices added to the rising costs for food and goods (including animal feed). Most small family farms suffer from poor cash flow. The typical scenario goes somewhat like this: The farmer pays cash for fuel and feed. The pigs are fed for a few months before they are ready for market. This is a time of cash outlay with little or no income. When the pigs are ready for sale, the market prices may not be sufficient to cover the past costs. If the pigs go unsold, they must still be fed. As feed prices increase (partly increased due to rising fuel costs), the amount of feed needed also increases because the pigs are now larger. At some point a sale must be made or the farmer could face a situation of diminishing return for the total investment. All of this points out the need to minimize off-farm expenses as an important aspect of making a small family farm financially viable.

The RTC-TH management team will be meeting to discuss a more "total systems" approach to the pig cost / price predicament. The system is based on self-sufficiency, networking, barter, limited sales of

farm surpluses used in value added products for specialized consumer markets, and better utilization of the farm and family members time and skills. "If the concept can be implemented in a cost-effective manner," says Greg Lee, "it can serve as a model for rural economic development and the survival of small rural family farms." ☺

