Rural Training Center-Thailand

2010 RTC-TH May Update

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Community-based environmental education for the self-sufficiency and sustainability of small rural family farms

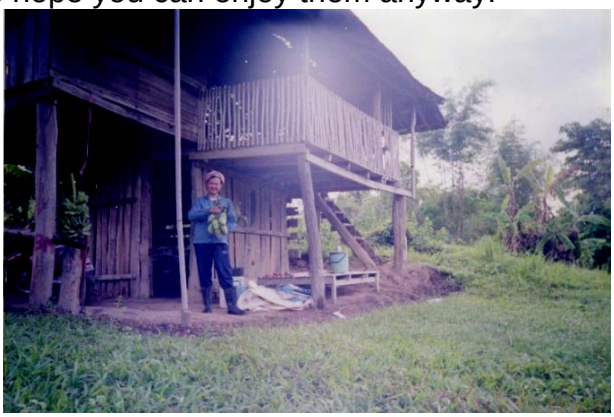
ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนชนบทขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

You may post questions / comments to the Discussion area of our website

Pictures from the Past

During recent efforts to prepare reports about our farm for the District and Provincial officials, we found some old photos of the farm. Older photos are few and far between due to the economics of the day. They also the showed the effects of age and storage in high humidity conditions. But we hope you can enjoy them anyway.

The original farmhouse~1992. Tang Suttisan (farm founder) and Uncle Jia who lived/worked on the farm.



Pi Oi at the old farmhouse ~1996. You can see some improvements to the original house.

The original farm house and sala on the central fish pond ~summer 2004

Summer 2005: The new farmhouse (built on the old farmhouse site) as it looked before the addition of the rainwater harvesting gutters and water tanks.

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The farm can be characterized in as 4 steps of increasing height: 1) the low lying rice paddies; 2) pasture and fish ponds; 3) the orchards; 4) the terraces.

It started with Tang and Umporn Suttisan clearing land that was not wanted nor used by other villagers. They labored intensely to first create the rice paddies. The fish ponds were next (first the central pond, then the west pond). Additonal clearing of land on the gentle slopes above the fish ponds created the orchards. They also cleared more land on the upper slopes on the west side of the central gully.

This was the basic farm which Saifon and Greg began to expand through selective purchasing of parcels directly adjacent to the existing farm: the pasture and the upper slopes on the east side of the central gully. Both parcels had been cleared and farmed by others in the past.

The rice paddies were the first farm features to appear. This is how the paddies appeared in winter 2010.

After touring and studying the situation of the rural farmers,the King was concerned that rural families first be self-sufficient in food production. He developed guidelines for land use: 30% each for rice paddies, fish ponds, and orchards and perrenial trees, and 10% for animal husbandry, buildings and other activities. About 1977, Tang Suttisan read about the King's Theory and applied the concepts to his farm.

Tang Suttisan was the first in the area to dig a fish pond on his farm. The ponds were to assure water for rice growing and to raise fish for food and potential cash sales.

The central fish pond with the old sala, pig pen, long'an orchard and pumphouse in the background (~2004).

Pi Oi (~1999) standing by a sign near the West fish pond recognizing her father's fish pond as a first in the area.

In spring 2006, we add the third fishpond to the farm. A former rice paddy area was dug out and a berm created to form the pond. We wanted to collect more water in the rainy season. Protecting the watershed up slope helps to assure subsurface flow to re-supply the ponds.

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Upper farm above the orchards and water tanks ~1999.

Summer 2005 view from the upper slopes of the farm

Pi Oi starting the Long'an orchard ~1999.

Pi Oi in the Long'an orchard; summer 2004

Summer 2004: The upper slopes and the central gully, before and after the rains.

The old cowshed about summer 2004. (The red boxes are for the long'an harvest that was just beginning.}

Jan 2006: The old cowshed was replaced with a new one on the west boundary of the farm.

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2005: First rainwater harvesting efforts at the new farmhouse.

The closest weather station with rainfall data is about 12 km away. The high variability of rainfall over short distances reduced the effectiveness of the data for rainwater harvesting calculations.

Our first rainwater harvesting relied on existing materials and containers. The results from these early efforts reinforced our interest to improve our rainwater harvesting efforts to deal with the region's increasing drought potential.

Fall 2005: Two rainwater tanks built for the farmhouse.

2006: Two pig sheds built and the upper slopes of the farm are terraced to manage soil/water resources.

Compost pile and the old cow shed ~1999(?) with the old cowshed in the background.

2005 compost bin set up near the new farmhouse (with chicken coops in the background.

Status Update: 1) Currently we have no cows and drastically reduced the number of pigs. 2) One pig shed was removed due to serious soil erosion of the adjacent fish pond berm. 3) The compost bin was relocated due to re-landscaping of the parking area next to the farm house. 4) Five more water tanks have been built to increase our rainwater storage. 5) We added a series of poultry pens for turkeys, geese, and ducks.

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RTC-TH Pollination Success in Salt Lake City

Following her recent visit to the farm, Chistina Hayden, Hser Ner Moo Community and Welcome Center, education program coordinator in Salt Lake City, UT adapted and used RTC-TH REEEPP lessons in a number of school gardens, community and an apartment / container gardens in her community.

Ironically, the RTC-TH came out of Greg Lee's efforts on connecting urban families to nature as a means to sustain urban neighborhoods. This led to an international volunteer project adapting those lessons to rural northern Thailand and the sustainability of small rural family farms. Christina's efforts bring things full circle back to an urban setting.

Christina works with re-settled Karen refugees from camps in Thailand. She is using gardening as a way to draw on their past knowleged and skills and bring a sense of the familiar to the refugees as they continue their transition to American society. Gardening can be theraputic. But additionally, for the Karen, they can grow and eat familiar vegetables and herbs which are not readily available in American markets. Christina effectively networked with businesses, schools, senior centers, and private individuals to cultivate a growing sense of community for the refugees and local residents.

Composting is a required "course" for the gardening program

A community garden for "at risk youth" has given rise to school garden and apartment/porch garden programs

Families who adopt garden plots to care for when school is not in session get to decorate the garden box.

Christina leads an apartment porch gardening effort.

Young volunteers pitch in to green and grow.

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RTC-TH Amateur Radio

VHF and HF radios and related gear were installed in Sparky as part of the RTC-TH EmComm program.

Sparky, rigged with a temporary HF antenna for mobile operations, awaits a mobile VHF antenna.

Mark Hayden (N7YLA) good friend and loyal ESSI/RTC-TH fan got me involved in amateur (HAM) radio about 1 year before I retired. It can be, as with most hobbies, an expensive endeavor (which makes me wonder if this was a result of "caring and sharing" or of "misery loves company").

"Sparky" the Batt-mobile is an integration of our IFS (Independent Fuel Systems) efforts and community service effort to provide EmComm (emergency communications) services. We recently completed installing the VHF and HF radios in Sparky. Work is proceeding on antenna systems for mobile operations as well as setting up temporary masts and antennas when parked for longer stops.

Sparky, functioning as a rover/scout, will have supplies to support a crew of 2 persons for a 2 day deployment. Sam (the container/trailer) can serve as a portable field base station and will be outfitted for 1-2 week deployments with a crew of 2. Both will be set for rapid deployment. They will be "Go-bags on wheels" so to speak. This is a work in progress, so stay tuned for further updates.

RTC-TH Supports GERC EchoLink Demo

Mark (N7YLA) and JIM (KG6TQT) staff the GERC Echolink station set up outside Jim's motor home.

On May 22-23, the RTC-TH EmComm program provided support to the GERC (Glendora Emergency Radio Communications) team demonstrating HAM radio for the Boys Scouts Centennial Jamboree in San Dimas, CA via "EchoLink" (a special HAM radio internet interface). The link was made possible with computer technical help from Kasam (HS5ASA) and Jaime Aguilera setting up an RTC-TH computer and Mark Hayden (N7YLA) coordinating the HAM radio activity in LA.

GERC wanted to showcase HAM radio to the scouts. They set up VHF and HF radios

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to let the scouts make live radio contacts as a way to motivate them to learn about radio technology. But Mark also wanted to demonstrate an international contact via EchoLink. EchoLink is available only to licensed "HAM" (amateur) operators. Contacts can be made over the internet using a computer with or without a radio. For new HAMs, it is a low cost way to get involved because it doesn't require buying a radio.

Ray (W8LH), Smokey the bear, Mark (N7YLA) and Richard (KG5TRD) in the background.

The time difference between Thailand and California meant we had to be operating at 2300 hrs in Thailand to contact them at 0900 in California for the start of the event. Unfortunately, we had a late night thunderstorm in Thawangpha with frequent lightning and heavy rain causing us to lose our internet connection after only 45 minutes of contact. Early the next morning we were not able to re-establish contact. However, we made a big impression. Mark reported long lines of people in the afternoon waiting for a chance to use EchoLink to contact us.

K6U, the special event call sign used by GERC at the BSA Centennial Jamboree at Bonelli Park in San Dimas, CA

Scouts getting on the air to earn their "First Contact" award. William (KI6YBW) in the red shirt is a 12-yr old scout and licensed amateur radio operator.

The GERC members succeeded in introducing HAM radio to the scouts. This event was a big success. GERC will be teaching a Boy Scout Radio Merit badge event in June 26, 2010. They plan to have an EchoLink demonstration and invited us to participate again.

International cooperation in emergency communications is important. A family emergency plan calls for having a contact in another state. The idea is that the disaster is unlikely to affect both places at the same time. Also, local systems may be damaged or overloaded making it impossible to contact family and friends. However, long distance communications may not be disrupted as much.

RTC-TH support for GERC activities gives both groups the framework for international EmComm support should the need occur. It also enables these groups to help each other educate youth and the public about amateur radio as a hobby and as a source of practical job skills in a wide variety of fields.

Providing opportunities for youth is an important way to recruit "new blood" to sustain any organization.

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Faces from the Past

Katie and Jaime finally on the farm after yearning for years to visit Thailand,

Katie and Jaime Aguilera, former ESSI team leaders, visited the farm. Jaime took a Geography class with Mr. Lee. He and Katie volunteered on numerous ESSI and RTC-TH community service activities in the Los Angeles area. They were very interested in the Thailand volunteer projects, but they were usually busy working and studying to make the trips.

For years they had tracked the RTC-TH activities and efforts from afar. In Spring 2010, they came to teach English in Thailand to for a year and finally got to visit the farm.

Katie gets a grand overview of the farm from Greg at the old water tanks on the west terrace road.

Alan Pollack was one of the original National Wildlife Federation (NWF) Habitat Stewards we trained in Los Angeles in 2004. He gives back, teaching what he has learned. Read about him in a local news article which also lists his e-mail contact information (http://www.dailynews.com/homeandgarden/ci_14993075). You can also visit the National Wildlife Federation website to learn more about the Backyard Wildlife Habitat program (http://www.nwf.org/In-Your-Backyard.aspx)

Alan being awarded his NWF Habitat Steward certificate at the completion of his training in April 2004.

Melinda Hughes (NWF), Alan, and Erika Rodriguez (ESSI) with his Habitat sign.

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