



RTC-TH Sep 2011 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

Thailand's Worst Floods in 50 Years

Floods have hit 58 of Thailand's 77 provinces. Some dams are over capacity with more getting near to capacity forcing officials to release water to prevent the dams from failing. Downstream provinces are forced to be flooded in an attempt to keep rising rivers from flooding Bangkok.

We were traveling from Bangkok to Nan along the Asia Highway (#1) through heavily flooded Ayutthaya and Pichit Provinces. The Asia Highway was still open, but other major roads were flooded and had to be closed.



Flood waters reach the shoulder of Hwy #1



Rising flood waters encroach on the road and shelters.



Evacuees fill tents on the shoulder of the highway.



Construction crews and equipment work to stem the tide.



A massive effort to build "rip rap" to strengthen levees.

In This Issue

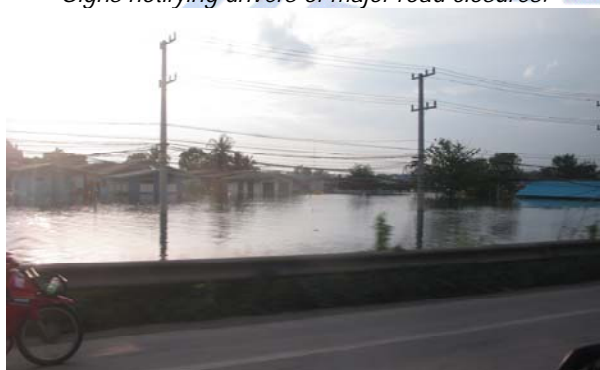
Thailand's Worst Floods in 50 Years	1-4	Meet the "Waste Farmers"	7
Rain Damaged Mountain Roads	4	2011 Editions of CbE Publications Released	8
Friends on the Farm	5	Some Other Food We Grow & Eat	9-10
A Lanna Thai Tradition: Kwang Beetle Fighting	6	Life After Empty: New Uses for Discards	11-12



Signs notifying drivers of major road closures.



A major highway appears to be a canal.



Flooding near the highway is at least 1 m deep.



Even detour routes are threatened by flooding.



Boats seemed to be in short supply.

So far more than 200 lives were lost with more than 2.4 million others affected. Estimates of crop losses could be about 20 billion THB (\$0.6 billion USD). Mainly affected are rice, corn, and banana crops and fish and poultry production.

Criticism abounds. Some officials stated various departments were not well coordinated. Lack of adequate preparation is being cited despite the fact the annual monsoons are a well-known entity. One news report stated local officials were being ordered to scout out higher ground to use as evacuation areas. The order came AFTER the area was flooded. Other critics say little emphasis and spending are placed on preventative measures.

Various international disaster agencies are urging Thailand and other SE Asian nations to increase spending on disaster preparedness and relevant infrastructure projects so as to be better prepared to prevent flood disasters.



Boats are in high demand



A beautiful sunset belies the misery of the flood.



The Ping River rose and flooded Chiang Mai.
alleviate some of the suffering.

Education about disaster preparedness seems to need more attention. Reports from Chiang Mai tell of officials giving warnings in advance of the flood. However, many residents ignored them; casually observing the water levels seemed “ok”. Later victims frequently reported “the flood waters rose so quickly” they had little time to react. One cannot help wondering if more public education about emergency preparedness might

The typical monsoonal trough has shifted further south so the RTC-TH was not so directly affected. The heavy rains began with a successive wave of tropical storm systems from the Pacific and Gulf of Tonkin. It began with Tropical Storm Nock-Ten. Most recently the remnants of Typhoon Nesat brought. Thailand is expecting the remnants of Typhoon Nalgae to follow a similar track and dump more rain on Thailand. The 5 main rivers of the north all feed into the Chao Phraya that flows through Bangkok. Some estimates indicate the flood water from the upper reaches of the Chao Phraya will reach Bangkok in mid-October.



Property damage is wide spread.



Flood waters recede in some areas only to rise again.

The bottom three images on this page from the internet under “fair use” education clause.

The ground in many areas is fully saturated and further rains will increase the risk of landslides in addition to more flooding.

There have been cases of food poisoning from eating prepared food that was left out too long after cooking. In some areas, lack of sanitation and clean drinking water has caused disease to take its toll. Government mobile medical teams have been dispatched to help the flood victims.

Image on the right is from the Internet under "fair use" education clause.



Government mobile medical units sent to flood ravaged areas.

The RTC-TH has not been directly affected by the recent flooding.

Rain Damaged Mountain Roads



Washouts reduce traffic to one lane.



Landslides force lane closures until cleared



The heavy summer rains took their toll on mountain roads in Nan Province. We took these photos while driving along Highway 1148 going from Thawangpha west to Phayao and Chiang Rai Provinces.

Hwy 1148 is the main road through the mountains. Any serious landslides or washouts means villages in the region are cut off from relief supplies and help.

Friends on the Farm

Peter (HS0ZGM) stopped by for a visit and side trip to our farm with his wife Umporn and daughter Jasmine. They live and work in the UK, but return “home” to visit in the summer.

The open spaces and solitude of the farm with its fish ponds made them ask where we were going to build a new house. Jasmine and Umporn got very “favorable” impressions of the farm. Umporn enjoyed the longan and Jasmine got her favorite, fresh sugar cane.



The Chapman family: Umporn, Jasmine, and Peter



Peter and Jasmine walking in the Longan orchard



Umporn on the lookout for left over Longan



Jasmine's close encounter of a fresh kind.

Jasmine's close encounter with fresh sugar cane was an eye-opener. Prior to this she had only known raw sugar cane as a cut and packaged food item in the market. On our farm, she got to see it growing wild and tasted it fresh cut. So it was a real treat when Saifon's mom cut a long stalk of sugar cane to take home from the farm.

Peter has plans to retire in Thailand. Retirement is still on the horizon, but it doesn't hurt to think ahead and plan. A dedicated ham, he would only consider

living in Thailand if he could have his radios! The occasional visits necessitated a temporary set up using bamboo masts and a horizontal wire antenna. He likes to work the 20 m band. At home in the UK, he has a trailer mounted crank up antenna. It's uncertain if he could move the trailer here. But if he does, it will be a unique sight in rural Nan Province. 🌐

A Lanna Thai Tradition: Kwang Beetle Fighting

The breeding season of the “Hercules Beetle” (*Xylotrupes Gideon*) is from September to November. Males compete for females. Ancient Lanna Thai people noticed this natural behavior and used the insects as a form of entertainment.

When it became a menu item, the Kwang beetle was almost wiped out. Mr. Pirath Disthabamrung created the “Hercules Beetle



Pua District in Nan Province is home to an annual Kwang Festival. Club of Thailand” and attracted international conservation attention. His efforts to revive the ancient Lanna Thai tradition of beetle fighting is a key reason why the Kwang beetle is thriving in northern Thailand today.



Mr. Pirath Disthabamrung

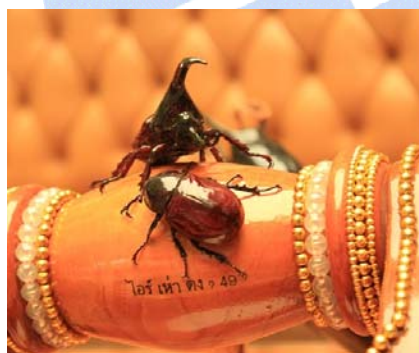
There are rules for winners and losers. The beetles do not fight to the death. The fight takes place on a 1m long log with a hollowed out compartment to hold a female. The first beetle to lift its opponent by its horn is the winner. There are traditional rules governing beetle fighting.

People in Burma, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam as well as in some countries of Latin America and Africa train Kwang beetles to fight. But the northern Thai people seem to be the

masters. They are uniquely able to get their beetles to turn left/right, go forward/backward on command.

Some folks raise Kwang beetles in captivity. At the end of the festival, winners and losers are allowed to mate with females. Many of the beetles are returned to the wild to produce the next generation of beetles. This is Kwang beetle conservation in action. 🌐

Photos for this article are from the Internet under the “fair use” education clause.



Meet the “Waste Farmers”



John-Paul Maxfield, Aron Rosenthal, and Greg Lee during a tour of the Waste Farmers composting area.




Waste Farmers is a Denver, CO based operation committed to the idea that healthy soil is the foundation for a healthy people, economy, and nation. They take composting very seriously. In fact, their entire operation adds veracity to the RTC-TH C.O.M.P.O.S.T. program (Creating Our Most Precious Organic Soil Treatment).

Waste Farmers gathers “clean” organic waste from restraints and schools that agree to separate their kitchen wastes. The key was to reduce the costs of waste disposal and provide businesses with an option to paying for trash disposal in landfills. The appeal is for businesses to advertise “eco-friendliness” and encourage prospective patrons to support the effort of greening America. At the heart of Waste Farmers is making high quality compost. Toward that end, they fortify their compost by using worms, biochar, and other critical minerals to make truly healthy soil.

We were fortunate to meet with John-Paul Maxfield, Founder, Visionary & Fearless Leader, and Aron Rosenthal, Director of Operations during a brief visit to



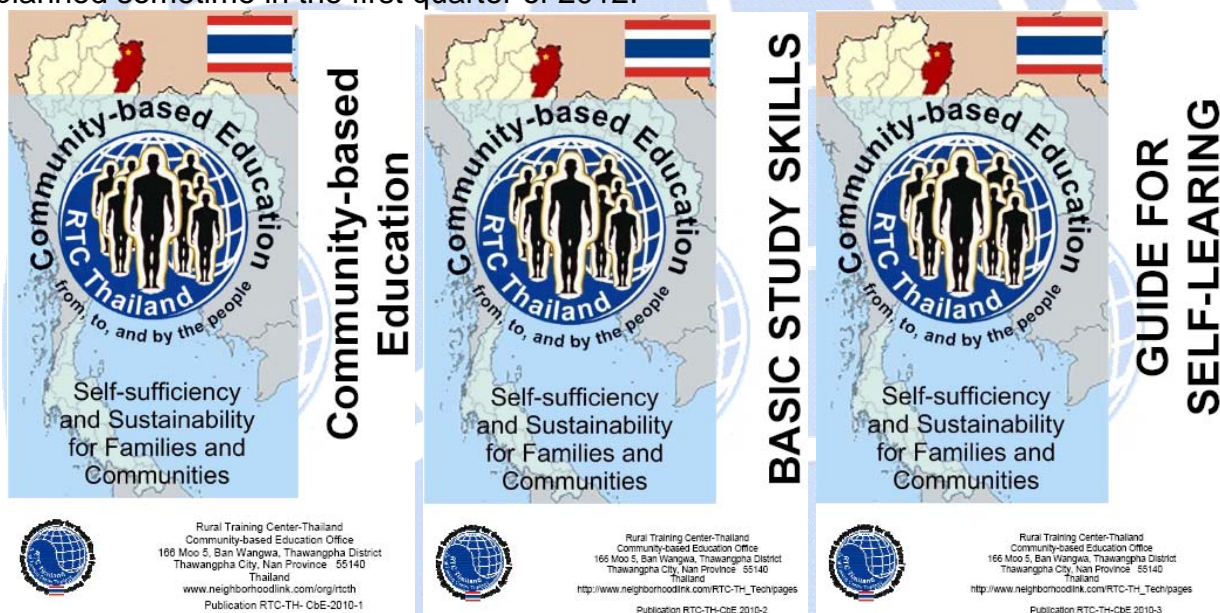
Denver. They took time from their busy schedule to show us around, explain their operation, and expressed their amazement that we were in Thailand and heard about them. It all goes to show, it is better to network than to not work! The added insights of their composting methods will be incorporated into RTC-TH practices. 

(Learn more about Waste Farmers at <http://www.wastefarmers.com>)

2011 Editions of CbE Publications Released

Education reform has been a key topic of concern in Thailand. The general trend is to try to move away from a Confucian / authoritarian rote memorization process to a more open one embracing critical thinking and empowerment. The ideas are often good sounding and well-intended. Putting the ideas into practice is an entirely different matter.

The RTC-TH Community-based Education (CbE) model has attracted the attention of some Thai university faculty. Through discussions and e-mail communications over the past few months, that interest spawned our need to review, revise, and update the 4 key CbE papers. To date, the first 3 of the series have been updated and released. The 4th in the series involves curriculum development. A major overhaul is being done to include checklists to help novice teachers see the step-by-step details. Release is planned sometime in the first quarter of 2012.



Greg Lee, RTC-TH Co-Founder (left) and Prof. Udomchoke Asawimalkit, Dean of Research, Dept of Political Science & Public Administration, Chiang Mai University (right) discussing the RTC-TH Community-based Education model.

Thai faculty are interested in techniques that make their classes more engaging for students. A typical lament is the lack of student participation in class. Most teachers are using standard lectures in which students passively listen to the teacher. Some teachers have expressed the desire to adapt some of our CbE techniques in their existing classes.

As in any college system, curricular changes are an involved process that takes time. These teachers need to find ways to improve their classes with a minimum of bureaucratic approval procedures. 🌐

Some Other Food We Grow & Eat



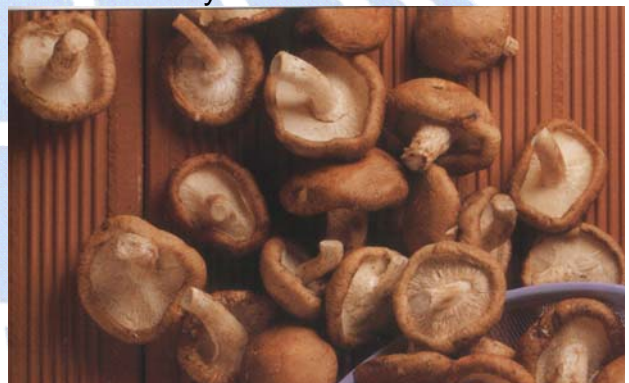
Okra



Oyster mushrooms



Shallots



Shitake mushrooms



Straw mushrooms



Sweet potatoes



Water morning glory



Winter melon



Pumpkin



Bamboo Shoots



Smooth gourd



Banana Bud



Taro



Red Chillis



Hed loom mushrooms



Garlic

Life After Empty: New Uses for Discards



Empty toothpaste tube = pocket protector

The RTC-TH takes “Reduce, Re-use, Recycle” seriously. Here are some of the ways we have reduced solid trash by re-using things that are often tossed out. Plastic packaging is a common target. Some of these plastics are hard to recycle. If they are the “right” size for our needs, we spread the word to family and friends to save them for us.

We are motivated to do this for a variety of reasons: 1) thrift: re-use helps stretch our budget; 2) reduce solid trash, 3) it's hard to find some goods in our rural area, so making do with what you have is an creative thinking exercise example for the Ban Na Fa Elementary School students.



Empty facial product tube = cell phone holder in Sparky



Empty vitamin bottle = radio connector protector



Empty water bottle = stick level survey tool



Empty plastic box = radio holder in Sparky

My parents came out of the Great Depression. I grew up seeing their example of thriftiness. For me, it's not a pack rat mentality. It is amassing low cost resources. All of this preparation paid off. It allows us to run the RTC-TH on a shoe string and still get the job done. It is also an opportunity for creative problem solving to find viable solution alternatives.



Empty shampoo tube = tool pocket case



Empty cereal box = drawer organizer



Empty pill bottle = ant bait container



Discarded plastic box = lightning detector holder



Empty curtain package = equipment pouch



Empty snack containers = equipment storage kits

It helps to have the big picture and to be aware of the myriad of projects ongoing in the RTC-TH. Keeping the organization small definitely makes this easy to do. This awareness helps develop your mind's eye and to watch for potentially useful discards. We also try to develop solutions using "off-the-shelf" items and technologies to help keep costs down. 🌐 (to be continued in future update reports)