



RTC-TH Nov Update

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

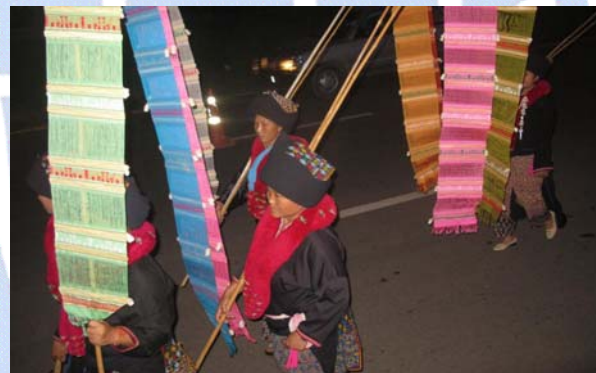
ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนชนบทขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

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Loy Krathong in Thawangpha



Loy Krathong is an annual festival coinciding with the full moon at the end of the rainy season. It is a major event on the local calendar with people coming from far and wide to join the festivities. Thawangpha held a huge parade. It isn't the Rose Parade, but the enthusiasm was high just the same. Thais and hill tribe groups in their traditional ethnic clothes marched with the colorful floats.



Fireworks are an integral part of the festivities. They range from sparklers and sky rockets to small and large firecrackers. Sky lanterns are also popular items.

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A large stage was the center piece for song and dance performances and competitions as well as a local beauty pageant.



Fun, music, dancing and fund raising all in one place. Pretty dancers entice people to buy tickets and join in the celebrating (above). An air bounce gives children fun and excitement at the festival.



Some of the numerous food vendors at the festival. There is no shortage of food.



The mix of sights, sounds, and smells seems infinite. There's something for every taste.



With so little air traffic overhead, sky lanterns are not a problem as in other more populous areas. In contrast to last year, many more people were buying and launching these into the night sky.



With the full moon and the inky night sky as a canvas, the numerous sky lanterns rose high and were carried wide by the prevailing winds.



Saifon launches our krathong down the Nan River with our wishes turning the normally dark river into a river of light.



Our Ban Wangwa dance group won second place in the group dancing competition.



If you don't make your own krathong, you can usually buy one at the festival. Water and fire are purifying elements. Floating a candle lit krathong is thought to carry your cares away giving you a fresh start.



Of course, no festival would be complete without sweets and desserts.

Making a Traditional Krathong

Modern life might be characterized as being too busy to get things done the traditional way. Some people opt to buy a commercial krathong made plastic and artificial flowers. But those don't break down like the traditional ones made of organic plant materials.

Banana plant materials (i.e. the stem or trunk and the leaves) make up the body of the krathong. Flowers, candles, and incense sticks are used for the decorative elements.

The base is a slice of banana tree "trunk" about 5 cm or so thick.



The banana plant is the source of most of the material used to make a traditional krathong.



The banana leaves are easily torn into strips about 5 cm wide. The length is set by the fact it is $\frac{1}{2}$ the width of the banana leaf. The strip is then folded several times to create a flat triangular point. The process is basically simple and repetitive. These will be sewn together to form a continuous skirt around the circumference of the banana stem base. Pins made from slivers of bamboo are used to attach the folded leaf skirt to the banana stem based.

Once the base is done, it's time to let loose of your creativity and add the colorful decorative flowers to your krathong. The candles and incense sticks are the



finishing touches. Some people add color beads held in place with pins and needles. We keep our krathong totally organic so it will breakdown completely.

Folded banana leaves were also used to decorate some of the parade floats. The photos below show you how intricate some of these designs can be.



Loy Krathong in Bangkok

City officials requested people NOT to float krathongs this year. They wanted to prevent more materials from entering the flooded streets and canals. The fear was the added materials would contribute to further clogging drains and pumps preventing the draining of flood waters. The continuing flooding in Bangkok could not dampen people's spirits from celebrating Loy Krathong.



Krathongs undoubtedly added to the trash in the flood waters. The garbage and flood debris pile up faster than it can be removed. Workers are struggling to deal with the problem. Public health officials are concerned. The longer the trash rots in the flood water, the more vermin may increase along with the dangers of disease. So far, there are no signs of cholera.



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Bridges to the Future

A series of “friendship” bridges across the Mekong linking Thailand and Laos fits into an even larger SE Asian – PR China infrastructure system. So far, 3 bridges have been completed and work has started on the fourth.

The first Thai-Lao Friendship bridge was opened in 1994. It is 1.7 km long. It has 2 traffic lanes each 3.5 m wide, 2 pedestrian walkways each 1.5 m wide, and a 1000mm gauge rail line in the median. Road traffic is halted when a train is crossing the bridge. This was the first rail link between the capitals of these two neighbors. Lao traffic drives on the right side of the road. Thai traffic drives on the left. The lane change takes place on the Thai side.

This bridge links the Lao capital of Vientiane (20 km away) to the city of



NongKhai in Thailand.

In conjunction with the bridging effort, ASEAN (Association of South east Asian Nations) has worked out a system to efficiently streamline the customs processes to move goods across international boundaries of its member nations.

The 2nd Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge was opened in 2006 linking Mukdahan, Thailand with Savannakhet, Laos. The bridge is 1.6 km long, 12 m wide with 2 traffic lanes



Traffic volume is more than 5,000 vehicles per day, generating taxes and fee revenue to the government of 60,000 baht a day on average. Laos is land locked and poor. These new bridges combined with hydroelectric projects have boosted Lao government revenues significantly.



The third Thai-Lao Friendship bridge is bridge 630 meters long and 16.7 meters wide. It joins Nakhon Phanom Province in Thailand with Thakhek, Khammouane in Laos.

The photo at the left shows the bridge nearing completion. The construction was behind schedule for a while, but is slated to open as we go to press.

The fourth bridge is now under construction to link Chiang Khong,

Thailand with Hueisay, Laos. Bridge foundations were started on both sides of the river on 26 May 2009. When completed, the bridge will connect to Thai highways



Vehicles cross the Mekong via ferry.

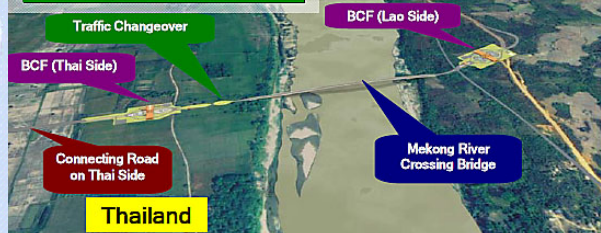


Bridge foundation work began in May 2009

Chiang khong - Houayxay Bridge

MAIN COMPONENTS OF DESIGN WORK

- ◆ The Mekong River crossing bridge (480 m.)
- ◆ Connecting road from Highway No.1020 to Highway R3 (11 kms)
- ◆ Border Control Facilities on both Thailand and Lao PDR
- ◆ Traffic Changeover in Thailand



The general plan for the fourth bridge



The fourth Friendship bridge under construction reaching all the way from Chiang Rai Province to Bangkok. The northern terminus beyond Thailand and Laos is Kunming, China (via Jinghong in Xishuangbana, Yunnan Province).

Recently in Nan Province, construction started to widen Hwy 1080 from the Nan provincial capital to Haui Kon on the Thai side of the border with Laos. There is a cross-border trading market here. Considerable development in the trade market took place over the past several years. Our first visit took us over a paved road full of potholes. More recently, the drive was along a newly paved road.





Widening Hwy 1080 from 2 to 4 lanes

Huai Kon shows up on a smaller road (brown) on the bottom edge map (left). The brown road extending south from Huai Kon into Nan Province is Hwy 1080. The widening of Hwy 1080 seems to fit into the SE Asian infrastructure network on the next rung down from the level of the Friendship bridges.

Laos is land locked, so building up the



regional infrastructure, will bring increased trade and economic development to Laos and its neighbors.

For China, expanding traffic on the Mekong River and road / rail connections helps to develop inland areas of China.

It is interesting to note that China signed a free trade agreement with ASEAN and separate trade pacts with individual ASEAN members. This way if the group as a whole gets bogged down, China can still conduct trade with an individual member country.

The completion of the road widening effort could open access to new markets for Nan-based businesses and farmers. Up to now, the major export destination was to the south via Bangkok.

To prepare for the shift, some schools in Nan have begun teaching Chinese language. For Thais of Chinese descent or with business contacts in Laos and China, the future may be brighter. Already, several business people in Nan have begun to expand their operations in Laos.

IPM in Thailand: An Overview

B.U.G.S. (Biodiversity Ultimately Gives Sustainability) is the RTC-TH approach IPM. This article will summarize Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Thailand based on information derived from <http://thailand.ipm-info.org>. It begins with "[Agroecosystem Analysis](#)" or AESA. This is necessary because every farm is unique. There is no simple cook book recipe or "one size fits all" set of practices that will work for everyone. IPM begins with the farmer's attitude or frame of mind; it is a culture of sustainability. When farmers care for the environment

and have a better balance with nature; their farm can be less favorable for crop pests and diseases. History shows the use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides seems to produce resistant organisms that are then dealt with by increasing levels of toxicity. The records show that many beneficial insects are killed in the process. This puts farmers in a position where they are fighting with nature.

IPM strives to have farmers work with nature to protect pollinators and natural insect predators found in the local environment. These pollinators and predators live their life and by doing so become "free" workers on small rural family farms.

The basic components for IPM on a small family farm can be organized into 3 broad categories:

- Soil Management
- Plants Management
- Pest & Predator Management



Hover Fly



Lady Bug



Lace Wing



Trichogramma Wasp

Soil Management: There are a variety of IPM activities involving soil:

- Composting (including the use of animal and green manures)
- Mulching (including handling of crop residues and rations; Low-Till / No Till cultivation, contouring and terracing)
- Water and fertilizer management

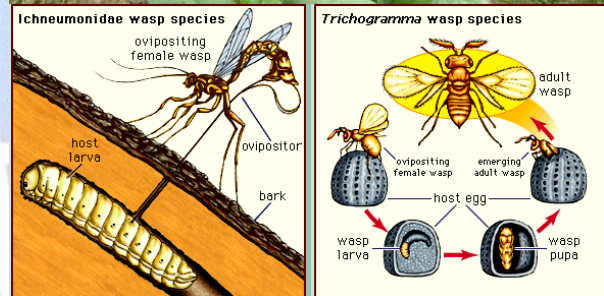
Plants Management: Effective plant management begins with careful selection of seeds and planting materials. These are followed by good planting practices.

- Seed and Plant selection (including seed banking, seed treatments, etc.)
- Planting Practices (including simultaneous sowing, intercropping, crop rotation, destruction of sick plants, appropriate plant spacing, etc.)

Pest & Predator Management: Managing pests and predators starts with homemade repellants, effective mechanical controls, effective biological controls, and as a last resort, chemical controls. The RTC-TH advocates avoiding and / or eliminating the use of synthetic agri-chemicals



- Repellants (use of homebrewed repellants, Tagetes, etc.)
- Mechanical Controls (including baits, bagging, barriers, inundation, manual collecting, traps, etc.)
- Biological Controls (including companion planting, selective use of pest pathogens, predators, perching, etc.)
- Chemical Controls (avoiding use of synthetic chemicals and pest resurgence)



The Thailand.IPM.org group trains farmers to make detailed field observations of the insects on various crops. They need to learn the life cycles

and stages of both insect pests and predators. Once these are identified, companion plants for crops and host plants for beneficial insects can be selected for use on the farm to replace synthetic agri-chemicals to reduce farm expenses and help to boost profitability.

IPM training includes hands on making and using of organic treatments using local Thai plants proven to be effective in treating crops and not putting toxins on crops, in the soil, or running off into the water.



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