



RTC-TH Jan 2013 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

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มีความสุขใหม่อายุ ! *Happy New Year!*



Photo from the internet; educational free use clause

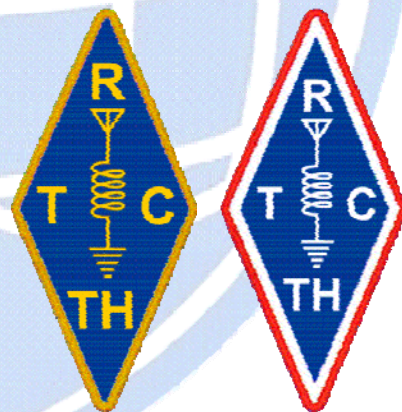
Some people release sky lanterns to celebrate less prosperous times.

Some tried and true ideas seem to persist: independence of action, hard work, setting priorities, and persistence. We don't recall a time when everyone or most everyone was guaranteed to succeed. (Maybe we don't move in the "right" circles.) It's hard for us to recall people getting ahead by doing nothing and having it all handed to them.

Our plans for 2013 continue on projects and activities from 2012: the self-sufficiency of the family farm in areas related to water supply and alternative energy, our ham radio EmComm efforts and lessons, and striving to accomplish more in terms of overall preparedness.

Attending MyGAREC 2012 re-invigorated us to continue our grassroots efforts on all fronts, especially EmComm. Recent studies show a disproportionate number of disaster victims are the rural poor in SE Asia.

Some readers and students asked about the choice of colors in the RTC-TH radio diamond. In response, we decided to replace the blue and gold RTC-TH radio diamond with a red, white, and blue on to better conform to the colors of the Thai flag.



*Out with the old, in with the new.
The "gold" seemed at odds with our grassroots rural focus.*

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To better prepare for future economic down turns, we are continuing our effort to “minimize” our life style to reduce off farm expenses. We see preventive health care as a big long-term goal in that effort. For us, the big picture is the integrated holistic system of farm-food-health (both mental and physical) we find in a sustainable self-sufficient small rural family farm. Following the King’s Theory, self-sufficiency is implemented relative to the circumstances and ability of the family.

We continue to see the King’s Theory as the viable path for the future of small



Photo from the Internet: educational free use clause

Illustration of a farm following the King’s Theory from “Self-Sufficiency: A Local Solution to a Global Problem”



Our objective: find a balance with the local ecology

less. People need to be more mindful of the impact they have on our environment and act accordingly. 🌍

rural families and farms. The current growth of the Thai economy, like the economies of Europe and North America, is unsustainable. We see the New Year as an opportunity for more small rural family farms to start down the path toward self-sufficiency. Rather than chasing the illusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, people should face the reality of adjusting their life-styles to more modest levels. We all need to reduce wasteful consumption, conserve water and energy, and to learn to do more with

Some of Our Local “Health Food”

Nutritional guidelines for good health suggest eating more fresh fruit and vegetables to get more fiber. Life in urban and suburban areas often means living at a great distance from fresh food sources. Processed and package foods are convenient. They can be kept for longer periods of time. But many agree the hidden price is the loss in natural nutrient value.

Here are some food from our farm and the surrounding land in the village that make up some of the “health food”

for our family. It’s a bit unusual in that most people read about a healthy food item through the advertising media. They want you to buy a new fad health supplement.

For us, it is more like rediscovering traditional herbal remedies. One example is purple rice. It is higher in fiber than the rice we usually eat. Many modern ailments



High fiber purple rice from our farm



In the local village markets, a kilogram bag of purple rice sells for 50% more than regular rice.

right, we can sell some of it to earn some cash. That is a bonus for us. It is interesting that some folks come by our house to buy purple rice.

Our family picks *Ya san ra*, a weed, whose leaves are dried, and made into an herbal tea. It goes by other names; there seems to be no common agreement. It seems to grow everywhere. No matter what they call it, they all seem to know how to use it.

The leaves are stripped from the stems and spread out to dry. There is no

seem to be related to a lack of adequate dietary fiber. We have the idea to “grow what you eat, eat what you grow”. Last year, we decided to plant purple rice rather than buy it in the market. Now, we have purple rice to mix with our regular rice to improve our diet.

At the same time, we sell surplus purple rice in the local market and earn 50% more per kilo than regular rice. Unlike commercial farmers, we don't grow the rice to earn income. We grow it because we eat it. If conditions are



Ya san ra picked in our yard.



The picked leaves are air dried in our kitchen on a simple woven bamboo tray.

other processing required. Once dried, they are added to hot water to make a curative tea. This is a common folk remedy for joint pain in our area. No prescription needed. No medical insurance, co-payment, etc. Just take a walk and look for this weed.

So far, I haven't had a need to try this (knock on wood). Other family members have used it before. The fact they are picking the leaves and brewing the tea must say something about its effectiveness.

Thais have “universal health coverage”. They only pay 30 THB (~\$1) to visit the doctor, and most prescriptions cost the same. Yet many folks still use these herbal remedies. 🌐

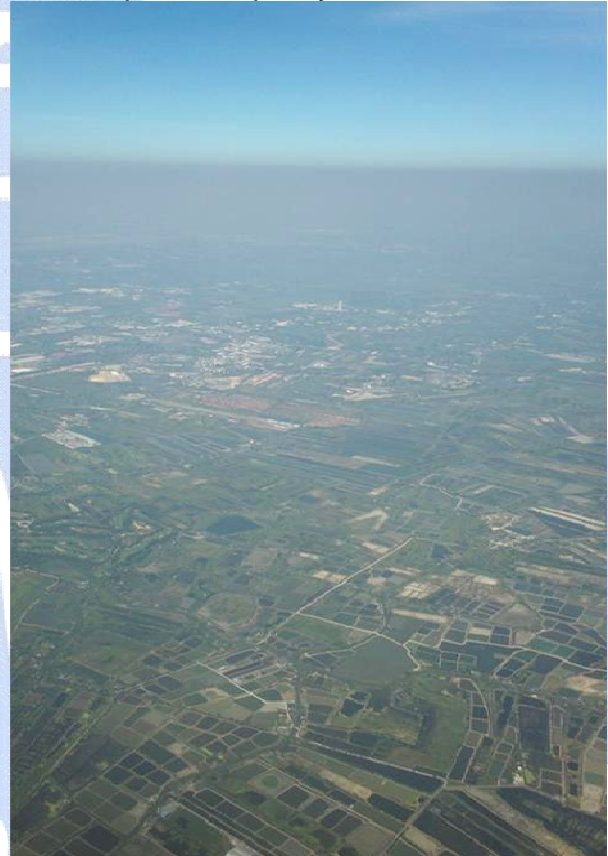
Poor Air Quality Over Bangkok

High pressure dominated much of northern Thailand. This created a temperature inversion over Bangkok. The inversion layer and the accumulated smog over the region can be readily seen in the photos below. The reddish-gray horizontal layer stands out in stark contrast to the clear blue sky above. The bulk of Thailand's industries are in the immediate vicinity of Bangkok and neighboring provinces. Then add the high vehicle concentration transport and private vehicles in the area. These are some of the basic ingredients needed to make poor air quality.

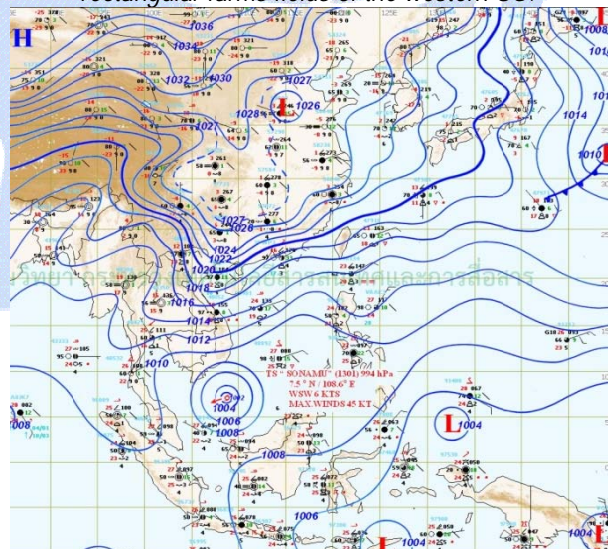


Burning in the field below doesn't help the situation.

Don't forget the main cause of the dry season is the dominance of high atmospheric pressure over northern Thailand. As the dry season progresses, we fully expect the past pattern of burning for land preparation to create similar air quality problems experienced in 2012. Smoke and haze enshrouded much of northern Thailand. Visibility was reduced significantly in some areas. One northern Thai airport had to close. People with respiratory problems faced a serious health threat. Unless the burning to clear land is greatly reduced or stopped, the poor air quality in the north will persist.



The "crazy quilt" field pattern contrasts to the regular rectangular farms fields of the western US.



New Year Holiday Traffic in Thailand

A recent return from a trip abroad put us on the road from Bangkok to Nan. The coming long New Year weekend meant more traffic on the road than usual. Of course, alcohol and driving don't mix well, and that compounds the danger. This makes driving hazardous even in "normal" (non-holiday) times for the uninitiated. There were certain circumstances that didn't allow us to avoid making our trip at this time of the year. During the drive, we had an opportunity to get some photos of common practices on Thai highways.

But first, a few background notes:

- Thailand uses left-hand drive. This means the extreme left lane is the slow lane.
- Highways in the Bangkok area appear to be "Interstate" caliber, but they do not have controlled access to the extent of US Interstate highways. Smaller side roads, traffic signals, breaks in highway dividers (often used for illegal road crossings), and random pedestrian crossings occur routinely.
- Motorbikes are the most common family vehicle in Thailand. They are under powered for the major highways, but add to the traffic mix all the same.



Rural folks working in big cities scramble to get home to the provinces cause holiday traffic congestion.



Left hand drive is the rule in Thailand.



Divider breaks encourage unsafe pedestrian crossing.



Motorbikes are often found on major divided highways

The normal traffic mix on Thai highways includes everything from pedestrians, bicycles, motorbikes, cars, pick-up trucks, homemade farm vehicles, buses, to tractor trailer rigs. Many farm pick-up trucks are overloaded. Of course, big loads usually mean slow movers. Slow moving traffic universally brings out a group of drivers that seem in a big hurry to die. This is revealed in the practice of passing on blind hills and turns, in no passing zones, and even trying to pass passing vehicles.

Here are some of the big loads we saw on this road trip.



Sugar cane on the move



Road hogs commuting to market



Live poultry piled high en route on the highway



Bags of rice overload a pick-up truck



Tractor trailer full of corn

People are on the move, too. They travel by motorbike, bus, songtiew (a pick-up modified as a mini-bus). Bus companies tend to put extra buses into service to try to accommodate the increased volume of travelers. As you might imagine, night driving is even more hazardous. That's when you are more likely to encounter drunk or tired drivers. There's no doubt about it. Holidays are the time for heavy traffic.



Long haul double-deck buses make roads narrower.



A local pick-up "mini-bus" travels between towns.



Overloads and big loads create traffic challenges.



The classic unsafe pass: passing in a "No Pass" zone across a solid yellow line on a blind curve with opposing traffic headed your way.



Excessive speed in mountain curves produces lane drifting. This can be especially dangerous when a downhill drifter is coming at you on a wet undivided two lane mountain road.



Few highways by-pass small towns forcing traffic into narrow, crowded local streets.



Passengers riding on the outside of vehicles are common practice in Thailand. Do they ever wonder what might happen if the tailgate latch failed?



Vendors along highways can become choke points. On divided highways the stopping cars tend to all face the same direction. But on smaller main paved roads in the provinces, opposing traffic tends to cross over lanes to stop at the stand facing the wrong direction. You can imagine the traffic hazard that creates when these wrong way customers pull out to continue their journey.

The photo on the right shows an overcrowded PTT / 7-11 parking lot. Customer parking may overflow to the shoulders of the highway near the entrance and exit. This reduces visibility for customers exiting or entering the highway. It adds one more challenge to the holiday drive.



The Thai government makes extra efforts to promote highway safety during the holidays. The challenge for law enforcement is staffing the effort when such a huge number of vehicles and people are on the move all over the country. Everyone must do their part to improve safety.



Increased police check points on all major roads.



Increase highway patrol units are deployed.



The use of timer displays on selected traffic signals.



Special rest areas are set up for the holidays.

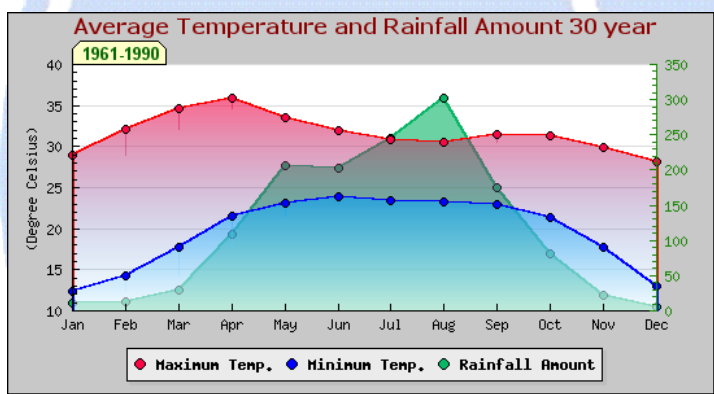
Many foreign visitors die in Thai road accidents each year. This has prompted some foreign families to urge their embassies to warn tourists of the dangers on Thai highways. Improved highway safety begins with you, the individual driver or passenger. It seems “common sense” is not very commonly available these days. As it is, life is short. There is no need to act as though you are in a hurry to die on the road. For drivers, it seems simple enough:

- Don't use intoxicants or drugs that dull your senses and impair your judgment and coordination.
- Don't drive in excess of the prevailing road conditions. Slow down on curving mountain roads and when the roads are wet.
- Avoid driving at night whenever possible. Many motorbikes are poorly illuminated and have missing / broken lights.

Passengers can be more pro-active when it comes to their safety on the highways.

- If on a motorbike or walking along roads at night, wear light colored clothing or a reflector vest.
- Avoid riding in unsafe or vehicles in questionable working condition.
- Avoid traveling at night whenever possible.

2012 Weather Data Wrap Up



The rainfall tally for Dec 2012 weather data is available. Our weather tracking matrix is updated. The complete rainfall summary for 2012 is shown below. Overall, the year was drier than the 30-year climatic average. We got about 89% of the 30-year average for total annual rainfall and the number of rain days.

Total rainfall for December was 3.05 mm which is ~52% of the 30-year average for December. Total number of rain days was double that of the December climatic average.

The government is still trying to implement improvements in the water / flood management system. It seems 2012 gave them a slight respite.

Blue Box = northern Thai SW Monsoon Season

Green shading = data above 30 year average for Thawangpha

Red shading = data below 30 year average for Thawangpha

Gray shading = Accumulated totals for the year to this month

30 Yr Average			2011		2012	
Month	Rainfall (mm)	Rainy days	Rainfall (mm)	Rainy days	Rainfall (mm)	Rainy days
Jan	11.0	2	1.52	3	17.78	3
Feb	12.6	2	14.48	2	1.01	1
Mar	29.2	3	69.33	6	31.24	2
Apr	108.0	9	98.55	10	163.32	8
May	206.2	17	208.53	22	205.21	10
Jun	202.4	17	396.20	17	100.31	10
Jul	244.1	21	340.87	19	175.01	23
Aug	302.3	22	321.05	18	303.2	23
Sep	175.6	16	371.08	20	131.06	11
Oct	80.4	9	147.57	7	34.03	7
Nov	22.7	4	8.12	2	77.48	9
Dec	5.9	1	0	0	3.05	2
Acc Σ						
30YrAv	1400.4	123	1977.30	126	1242.7	109

Drink Box to Cell Phone Charging Station

Empty UTH (ultra high temperature) drink boxes are a problem for recyclers in our area. The multi-layers of paper, foil, plastic material in the boxes are difficult to separate. Most people toss them in the trash or, worse yet, burn them.

A discarded UTH drink box can find new life as a cell phone charging station. All it takes is a few quick cuts, some string, and a couple of staples. This project helps to reduce desk top clutter, accidentally dropped cell phones, and cell phone charger cord tangles on desk and counter tops.



We got this empty box after drinking the contents



We made a horizontal cut across the front. This is the pocket of the charge station.



We made diagonal cuts up the sides of the box to the top back corner.



We cut off the sides and front, but left the top to fold over toward the back.

The top of the box is folded back until it rests on the back of the box. This forms a "loop" to hang the charging station on a string. The box top is then stapled to the back of the box (after placing the string in the loop). Use the string to tie the charging station in place. Loop the string behind the outlet box; snug the charging station box up against the bottom of the outlet. Tie it securely in place.



We used string to tie the charging station to the outlet box.



The phone charger sits in the pocket of the charging station until needed.



The cell phone sits in the charging station pocket while being charged.

The phone charger can be stored in the pocket of the charge station until it is needed. When charging a cell phone, simply connect the phone to its charger, put the phone in the pocket of the charging station, and plug the charger into the outlet. Everything is neat, close together, and can be easily found. Happy charging! 🌐

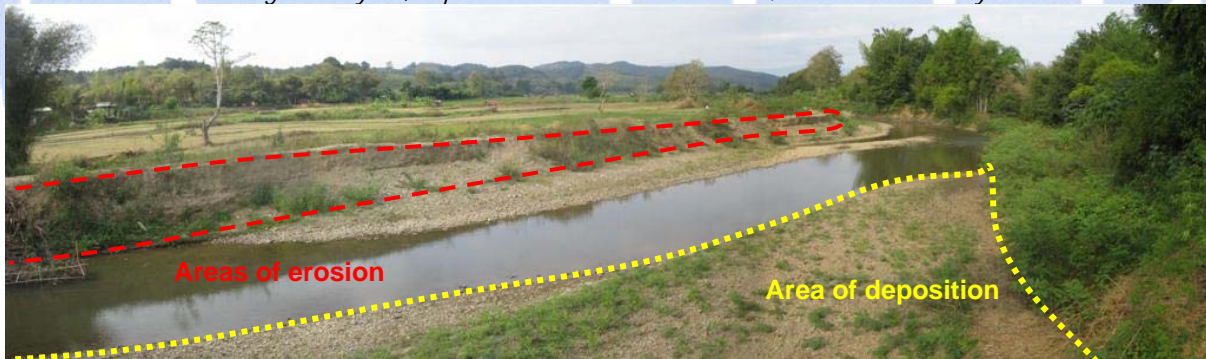
Nam Yang in January



Early dawn along the Nam Yang near the Ban Na Fa Bridge. Clouds enshroud Doi Phu Kha in the distance.



At the Ban Na Fa Bridge: Last year, deposition was on the north bank; erosion was mostly on the south bank.



On the downstream side of the Ban Na Fa Bridge erosion was on the south bank; deposition on the north bank.



The red line shows the high water level during 2011; yellow line shows the high water level of 2012.

The course of the river changes from year to year. This is a natural process in a flood plain. Most recently, erosion has been on the south bank bridge abutment. In the past, the north bank bridge abutment was threatened. There is a plan in the next 4-5 years to reinforce both abutments. 🌐

The Downside of Motorbikes

With 11,000 motorbike driver and passenger deaths annually, Thailand is ranked the worst in the world for motorbike safety. It is estimated that only 47% of people riding motorbikes wear helmets. The government has a helmet law on the books, but enforcement is lax. A major campaign began in 2010 to enforce the law and continues to this day.

Thailand uses European safety specifications for motorcycle helmets. But considering the climate differences, European specifications are not always so relevant to Thailand. Many people here find helmets of European design to be too hot when worn on the roads in Thailand.



High cost and limited availability of children's helmets are often cited reasons for non-helmet compliance

Motorbikes are the most affordable vehicle for individuals and families. In rural areas, this is the all purpose vehicle to get to a public transport line, market, hospital, government office, etc. With so many on the road, motorbike fatalities account for 70% of Thailand's road deaths.

In many rural areas, underage and unlicensed motorbike drivers are numerous. It's common to see many younger students riding a motorbike to school. Most don't have licenses. Police are reluctant to issue citations as many students are from poor families living in areas lacking public transportation. Some critics point out that a licensed driver does not mean a good or a safe driver. Thais tend to be easy going. It is common to see traffic driving the wrong direction on the shoulder of the road to avoid driving "long" distances in the opposite direction to a U-turn in order to go the way they want. Other critics say the fines are too low and are of little consequence. (But 200 THB to a poor family is a lot of money!)

Rather than raise fines and penalties, we wonder if a system of incentives and rewards might be more effective. Rather than create a climate of fear of punishment, why not combine the present traffic regulations with choices for incentives to gain compliance. Compliance could be rewarded by lower insurance rates and reduced motorbike license / and registration fees. Follow this with reduced or loss of insurance coverage when involved in a motorbike accident without a helmet. 🌐



Helmet laws don't cover bicyclists though they are all part of the traffic mix on the roads and have accidents.