



RTC-TH Aug 2013 Update 2

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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

www.neighborhoodlink.com/org/rtc2k5

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Landslides & Floods Hits Nan



Landslides affect roads in Pua (district to our north)

Several villages in Pua and Thawangpha were flooded as heavy rains hit northern Thailand. Two consecutive days of rain triggered flashfloods along streams, landslides on mountain roads, and general flooding along the Nan River. Flashfloods in Pua district undercut roads. The collapsed road harrowed traffic flow to a single lane.


Landslides blocked roads in the Pua District. It took several hours to re-open the roads. The Nan River rose to the 7.2

m mark (just below the critical 8.0 m level). Some homes and businesses along the river were flooded. About 100 families were evacuated as a precautionary measure. Residents were warned to sand bag against threatening flood waters.

The provincial capital was not spared. Flooding was confined along the Nan River front. A flood wall was still under construction. So the gaps were filled in with sand bags. However, the floodwater seeped through. Pumps worked frantically to try to keep flood waters at bay. Thankfully the water levels did not rise much higher.



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Nam Yang in Flood



The Nam Yang breached its embankments at 3 places just east of the bridge at Ban Na Fa.



Flood water reached the 3 m mark.



Water level before the flood.

In the pre-dawn hours of 9 Aug, about 59+ mm of rainfall caused water in the Nam Yang to rise from under 1.5 m to 3 m. The swift flowing water eroded and overtopped the south embankments both east and west of the Ban Na Fa bridge.

In the darkness of the early dawn, the flood alarm on the stream gauge began chirping and the red beacon was rotating. It reminded me of car alarms in LA going off during an earthquake. 🌐



Water overtopped the south embankment west of the Ban Na Fa bridge inundating corn fields and rice paddies.



Flood water over rice paddies. Lucky for these farmers, the water receded after 3 hours.

Our Ponds Before / After the Heavy Rains

Our fishponds are the obvious water sources for our farm. The ponds are fed by subsurface seepage from the slopes above them. This is our farm's watershed. The trees and mulch on the upper terraces reduce raindrop impact and enhance rain water soil infiltration. Once the soil is saturated, surface runoff goes into the gullies and our ponds fill faster.



The West Gully Holding Pond: full before the rain (left); filled to overflowing after the heavy rain (right)



For the rest of the rainy season, the threat will be overflowing ponds. Like dams, once the pond berms are overtopped, the earthen walls may fail and the berm is breached.



A failed berm would mean the loss of the pond, water, fish, and also the destruction of the adjacent paddies and rice crop. The pond overflow drains are our safety valves.

The West Fishpond was nearly full (above) and began to overflow after the heavy rains (below).



The West and Central Fishponds have holding ponds on the gullies that feed them. We try to slow the surface flow from the gullies entering the fishponds. As the holding ponds fill, the pond overflow drains are our only safety system. The West fishpond overflows into the Central fishpond. The overflow from the Central and East fishponds go to the rice paddies. 🌐





The Central Fishpond before the rains (above) and after (below).



The East Fishpond is filling with water and water lilies (above) and after the rains (below).



Ban Na Fa Carport Station Licensed

We moved one step closer to completing the initial set up of our Ban Na Fa carport ham station. On 13 Aug, we applied for and received the NBTC (National Broadcast and Telecommunications Commission, the Thai counterpart to the FCC) amateur station license. Combined with our renewed Thai reciprocal amateur operator license, we are set for legal operations for another 5 years.

Unlike the US, the license application process is done in person or via proxy. So we had to drive to an NBTC office. We chose to go to Bangkok because Saifon had other business there. So we drove for 10 hours from Nan to Bangkok.



Our new amateur radio station license for Ban Na Fa

With an eye on the budget, we chose to stop at Phitsanulok (about the half-way point) to visit a wholesale fruit market. We chose to buy 600 kg of pomelo. At the price Saifon negotiated, she estimated a selling price in Thawangpha that would earn enough to cover our round trip fuel expenses. As a bonus, we have some pomelo to eat. It is a favorite in our family.



Our contact and seller reported that farmers had smaller fruit to harvest this year. However, the sample we tried was delicious. This fruit can be stored for a few months. This gives us time to sell our goods. 🌐



Value Added Plantings



To boost incomes of small rural family farms, the King's Theory advocates selling surpluses in local markets IF conditions are favorable, and forming local farm cooperatives to sell to larger buyers. It is easier for us to focus on local markets. Any time you work with a larger group, it gets more complex and takes more time.

A simple way for small rural family farms to boost income is to add value to a



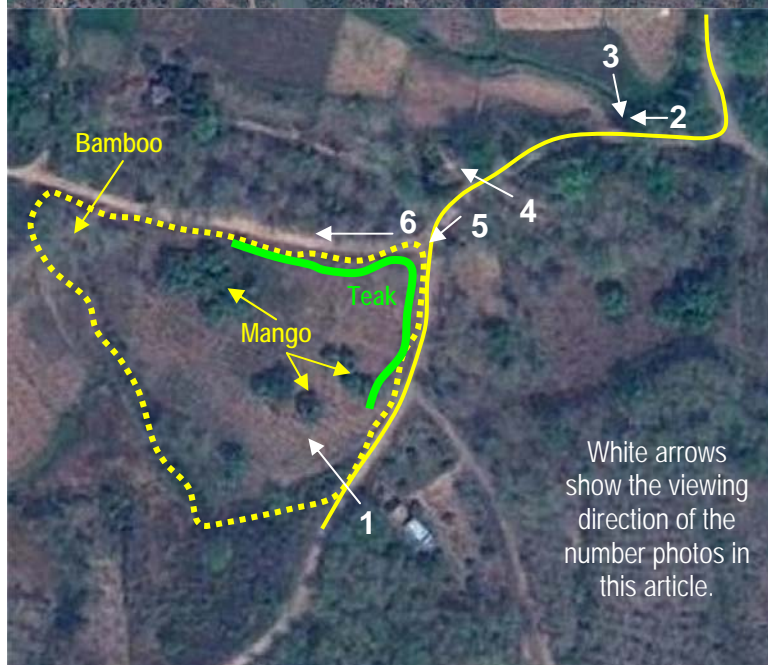
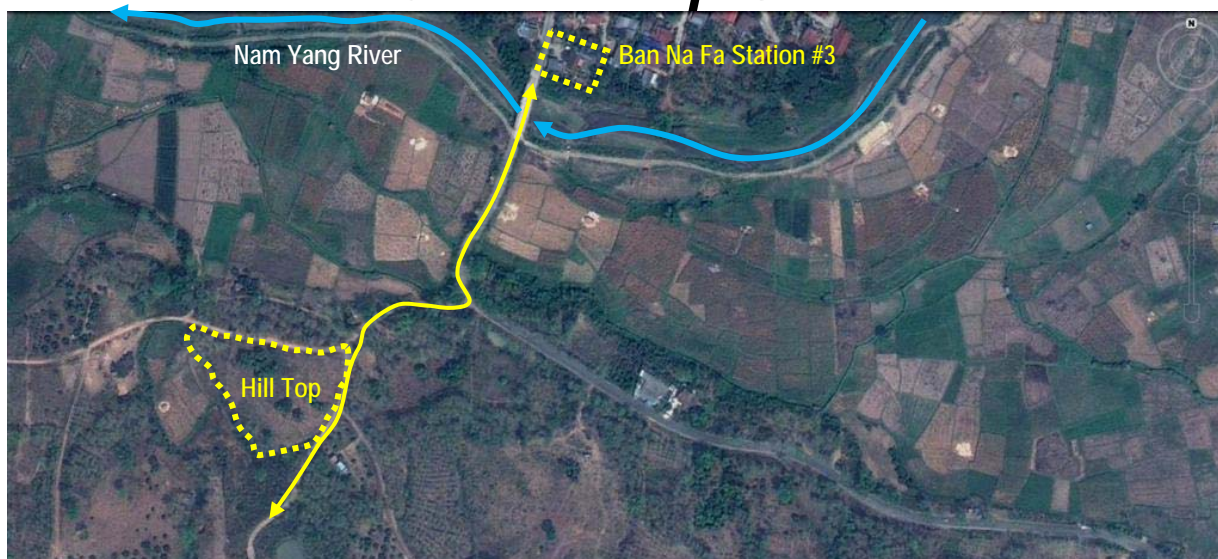
crop by growing it out of season. Mom was successful with her Thai egg plant garden. Most of our neighbors grow it as a dry season crop. So during the rainy season it is in short supply in our local markets.

Saifon and Pi Oi decided to do the same with chilis; grow them in the off season when others don't plant chilis. They will harvest the chilis when market supplies are low and prices higher.

They began planting chilis along the driveway. At the same time they maintain and promote biodiversity on our farm. The new chili crop is bounded by dry land rice and mixed among a variety of fruit trees (mangoes, avocados, and papaya) and some pineapples. 🌍



Our Hill Top Site



Our Hill Top site is a small parcel of land (3.53 rai / 1.4 acres) separate from our main demonstration farm. It is less than 0.25 km direct line of sight from the Ban Na Fa station in the village.

Teak trees form part of the boundary along the dirt roads that form a V on 2 parts of the property. Mango trees are scattered on the Hill Top. There is a small cluster of clump bamboo at the NW tip.

The numbered photos match the locations on the map on the left.

The Hill Top is currently planted with dry land rice. There is no water supply other than rainfall. There are mango trees scattered on the site. Teak trees are along parts of the boundary with some bamboo on the NW corner. We have resisted making a driveway or any paths on the land.



Hill Top panorama looking from SW corner to the top of the hill.

The Hill Top site is an alternative portable amateur radio emergency operating position. Our plan is to use portable push-up masts and antennas. Sparky could be driven into position and provide the necessary battery power for the radios.



Dirt access road to the Hill Top parcel



A boundary fence and clump bamboo

More development has taken place in the vicinity of the hill top. Limited land in Ban Na Fa and the proximity of the existing power line combine to lure people to build in the area. So far, 2 people have built small houses, and 2 businesses located here (a saw mill and a chicken farm).



A new house under construction



The NE tip of our Hill Top parcel.



Dirt road looking from SE to NE (Hill Top is center-left).

The road in photo #2 and the road to the right in photo #4 are segments of a planned “new” road. This is to be an alternative route to reduce traffic on route # 1170 (the main road from Ban Na Fa to Thawangpha. The new route is supposed to be a straighter alignment. The idea is to make it easier for heavy trucks.

It has been a few years since machines graded the original dirt motorcycle path. Little else has been done since. Progress comes slowly. 🌐

Feeding Fish: New Slideshow Lesson

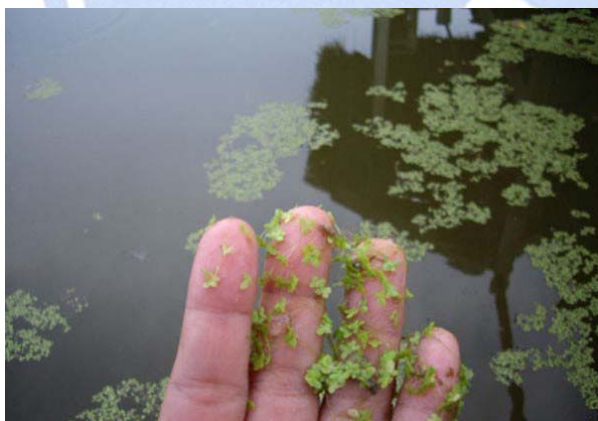
Life has a way of keeping us on our toes. Plans change, unexpected surprises pop up, and paths get twisted and sometimes come to a dead end. But after more than 3 years, the lesson about feeding fish on our farm is done!

In past RTC-TH Update reports, we touched on our efforts at finding free fish food on our farm. It fits with our attempts at sustainable agriculture. We started work on this lesson more than 3 years ago. After many interruptions, we finally had time to complete it.

As with so many of our other lessons, Feeding Pond Raised Fish has links to other lessons (e.g. G.R.O.W., M.E.W.S., S.A.P. and F.U.N.D.S.) to name a few. GROW and MEWS go into more detail about weather observations affecting fishponds and fish feeding. Some lessons tell how to make weather instruments for the farm. FUNDS brings in the financial aspects related to self-sufficiency and sustainability.



Another lesson from our demo farm



Duckweed is commonly found in pond water. sufficient and sustainable.

The alternative on-farm fish food items are a balance of plant and animal choices. All of these are local to our farm. They are provided by nature. They are free for the taking; so why not use them to your economic advantage? It is very much a “no brainer” for us. 🌱

The lesson is available at www.neighborhoodlink.com/RTC-TH_Tech/pages

The lesson spells out the basic factors related to feeding fish: water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and how weather conditions affect them. But the focus quickly shifts to feeding fish using on-farm food sources. We give many examples from our farm. The aim is to reduce off-farm expenses related to using commercial fish food. The goal is to save money to pay down farm debt. Freedom from debt is a critical part of making small rural family farms self-



New RTC-TH Program Launched

We received an increasing number of inquiries and requests for help in studying English. This motivated us to consider starting a new program we called “C-bEEP” (Community-based English Education Program).

C-bEEP takes a unique approach for teaching English: trying to solve the learning problem for the students. This begins with assessing their ability and needs. Language is a combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities and skills. The traditional classroom teaching approach is termed “grammar-translation”.

The RTC-TH education programs are under the umbrella program called PLANT (Personal Learning and Natural Teaching). A fundamental aspect of language learning is found in the way anyone acquires their native language. It begins with listening and attempted vocal repetition. However, in schools around the world, grammar-translation is the most common teaching approach. This depends more on reading and writing. The poor performance and low English ability of many Thai students and workers is a smoking gun indicting this teaching method.



Thai students struggle to learn English

is predicated on the family as the basic Education unit. Families tends to have multi-generational teachers with students being age and gender mixed. Lessons are multi-faceted, highly integrated, and focused on practical family and / or community activities. Classes take place just about anywhere. Sometimes we meet in a classroom. However, a class can meet just about anywhere there is enough room for the students. It could be a store front after hours, in a park, a farm field, or anywhere in the community.

Flexibility is the key element for successful operations. The RTC-TH C-bE effort encourages students to never limit their education by the lack of material resources or teachers.



A common problem for Thai students is listening, pronunciation, and speaking. These are the primary elements of how most people learn their native language.

We don't know how strict the English curriculum and school policies are regarding flexibility for the teacher. But taking a community-based education approach is a good alternative. The new C-bEEP efforts draws materials from PLANT, SEEDS, and C-bE. Personal Learning and Natural Teaching (PLANT)





Supporting Environmental Education Development and Sustainability (SEEDS) is the RTC-TH curriculum development program. Originally the effort focused on environmental lessons. Each lesson a combination of PAL (Practical Applied Lessons), Teach Backs, and community service projects. Now, it is expanded to include English language lessons.

The main SEEDS activities are 1) developing new lessons and programs, 2) revising and updating earlier lessons. Our lessons are all presented in English. This imposes a limitation in distribution and use in Thailand. On the other hand, RTC-

TH lessons can be used by Thai English language learners.

Community-based Education (C-bE) is an innovative education approach. It is an option to supplement existing institutional education. It can be an alternative education program for remote villages.

Practical applied lessons (PAL) make it easier for students to connect “academics” with practical skills. Combined with community service projects, students get hands-on examples of how to put the “earn” into learn.

Teach backs and practical lessons replace written exams. Pre- and post assessments make students aware of their progress. These remove the “fear of failure” common to most institutional education systems.



C-bEEP's basic thrust is toward speaking and listening. Reading and writing are the focus of advanced training. Both the basic and advanced lessons are characteristically “outside the box” approaches. Similar to all other RTC-TH programs, all lessons are PALs (Practical Applied Lessons). The structure of the lessons consists of assessment using pre- and post lesson “self-tests”. Basic level lessons concentrate on phonics, listening, and speaking. Class sessions emphasize active listening and speaking English.

Students are instilled with the idea that learning is life-long and requires self-selection and self-motivation. Students are expected to set a goal as to how they will use English in their lives. Lessons are tailored toward specific majors and jobs.



Greg Lee, the driving force of all RTC-TH programs and lessons. His innovative and creative methods are clearly “outside the box” of the traditional classroom.

To reduce costs and improve access, the lessons will be posted to the RTC-TH_Tech website. The class administrative structure is set for students to monitor their progress. The idea is to give them control and responsibility for their education. Learning a language requires self-discipline and dedication. For students only needing to “pass” a required basic English course, minimal performance may be acceptable. But for those hoping to use English

in a career or profession, the standards are understandably higher. This is also a challenge for foreign teachers who are native English speakers. Most may know English, but don't have practical work experience in a professional specialty. Greg's diverse background in the private sector and teaching is a key resource for the RTC-TH C-bE effort. ●

Some 2013 Wish List Items

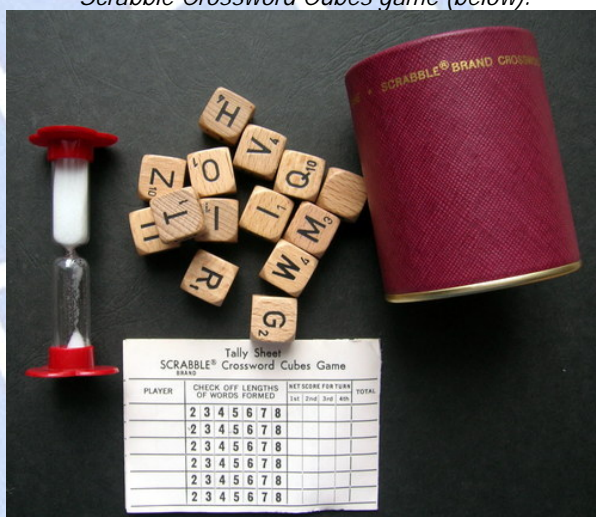
In an effort to build English vocabulary for Thai students, we are seeking two different Scrabble games: the traditional Scrabble board game and the Scrabble Crossword Cubes game. We ask our readers to search through their closets, attics, garages, and any other storage place for these unused games. We intend to put them into use in Thai classrooms. We are hoping to get 14 sets of each Scrabble game. Donor's are encouraged to send these games via mail (there is no rush; just use the least expensive option) to us:

Gregory & Saifon Lee
166 Moo 5 Ban Wangwa
A. Thawangpha, Nan Province 55140
Thailand

We are counting on the elements of novelty, competition, and fun to empower students to increase their vocabulary as they play these games. So if you no longer have use of these games, please consider sending them to us for "re-use" in the RTC-TH Community-based English Education Program (C-beep). Donor ID tags will be put on each unit so the students will know to whom they should give thanks.



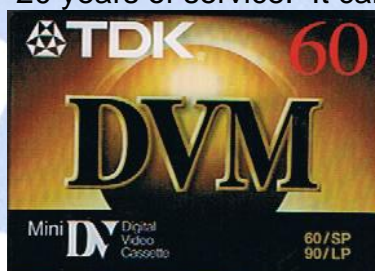
The regular Scrabble board game (above) and the Scrabble Crossword Cubes game (below).



We hope we can get 14 sets of each these two types of Scrabble game.



Canon ZR500 mini DV camcorder



Mini DV cassette tape

Another item on our wish list is a Canon ZR500 camcorder. Our original Mini DV camcorder died after 20 years of service. It cannot be repaired due to lack of spare parts. If anyone has an old Canon ZR500 camcorder (with the video cables, power cords, battery charger) to donate, we would appreciate it. We need the unit mainly as a tape player. We want

To use clips from our field trip video collection to make new English lessons for our educational programs in Thailand. Please be sure the unit you donate can play Mini DV tapes. We are not concerned if the camcorder cannot be used to capture video images. We really need it to play Mini DV tapes in our collection.

Thai students are curious about the world. We have several years of field trips in our archives. The trips involved US field trips as well as international trips to Indonesia, Egypt, and China (among others). We hope our wish can come true. 🌐