



# RTC-TH Nov 2013 Update

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

ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนบนบพขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

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## Our Farm Dry Land Rice Harvest



A team of 5 workers joined Mom to start harvesting the dry land rice on our farm. Generally each person cuts a swath about the span of their arms to either side. One hand grasps a bunch of rice stalks. With a slight twist of the wrist bends the stalks over. The other hand moves the sickle blade into the bend of the stalks. A slight tug and the stalks are cut. They repeat this about 4-5 times, then lay the cut stalks to dry on top of the past row of stubble.



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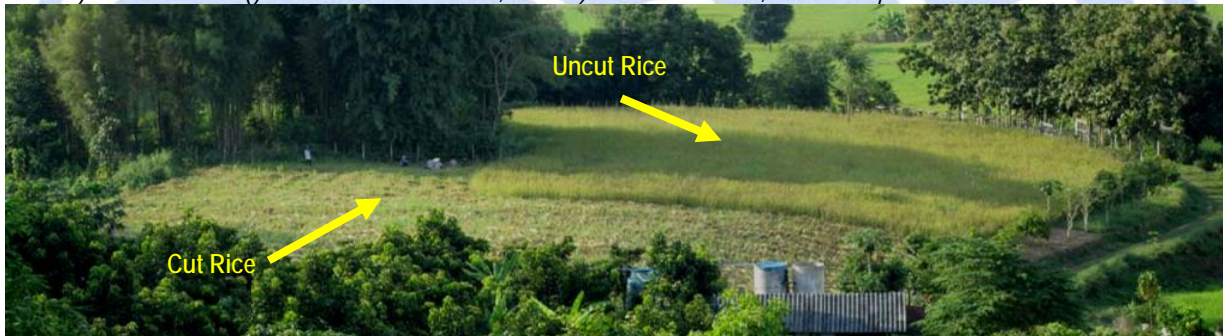
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*The dry land rice field (yellow outlined area ~6,919 m<sup>2</sup>). In 2 minutes, each completes a swath about 2m X 2 m.*



*After about 7 hours, the crew had cut nearly half of the 0.69 hectare (6,919 sq m) dry land rice field.*



*Second day, about 3 pm, the job is almost done. (They finished before the day's end.)*

It took 2 days to cut all the dry land rice on the farm. Now we wait for few days for the cut rice to dry. Then we will gather the rice to prepare for threshing. We hire a thresher and crew. They come to the farm, set up, and run the threshing machine. Our workers will help feed the rice into the machine. The straw and chaff are set aside for mulching and composting. The thresher owner is paid in cash or a few bags of rice. When we finish at the farm, we will turn our attention to harvesting the dry land rice from the Hill Top parcel. 🌐



## ***Preparing for Rice Threshing***



*Our field of dry land rice is cut, dried, and ready for threshing*

This is the continuing general photo summary of harvesting our farm's dry land sticky rice. After cutting the rice, it is dried in the field. Now we are ready to thresh it. We planned to gather the dried sheaves and hire a threshing crew. It took a bit more than ½ day to prepare things for the threshing crew. They were 4 hours late, and meant a very long day for us. We had to thresh at night.



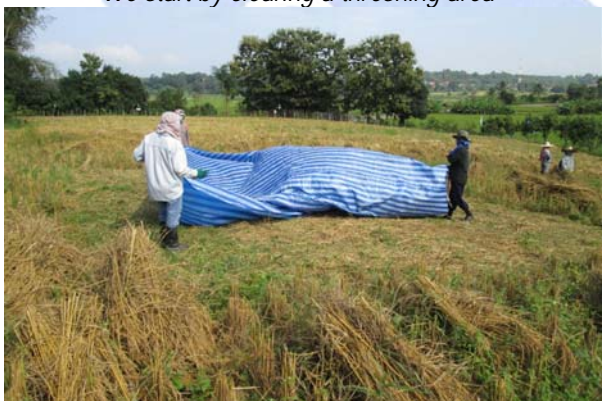
*Our harvest princess candidates are...*



*We start by clearing a threshing area*



*The cut dried rice will be brought here*



*A tarp is laid down to reduce the amount of rice grains lost during the threshing*



There is a general division of labor and pay. Women do mostly manual labor, do not operate equipment / machinery, and are paid less than men. Men do the heavy lifting, work both manually or with power tools / equipment and get paid more.





*Bundles of cut dried rice are hand carried to the threshing area.*



*Women pile 4 bundles in a pile*



*Men move about 4 piles at a time*



*Some men use a rope to carry 4 piles at a time*



*They lay the rope down.*



*After placing 4 piles on it, they wrap it around the piles*



*They tighten the rope around the piles*





*The rope compresses the piles making it easier to hoist onto their shoulders for carrying across the field.*

Of the 4 men working on our harvest, 3 used the rope method to carry the rice. They work steadily taking few breaks.

Another method of carrying piles of cut and dried rice is a bamboo pole. The pole is placed on the ground (see yellow arrow in the photo below). Several piles of rice stalks are put on the pole. After watching this done a few times, I got the impression that taller guys with longer arms might be the prime candidates for this method.



The simplicity of Thai farm tools on our rural farm is a stark contrast to the many specialized and mechanized tools on large agribusiness cooperative farms in the US.







*The piles are compressed.*



*Grasp the pole on both ends and get ready to lift.*



*It is a single swift lift over your head to carry the bundle on your shoulders across the field.*



Manual cutting has some advantages over machine harvesting. Selective cutting minimizes the amount of weeds in the chaff. On the way back across the field, everyone looks for stray rice stalks. Machines cut everything, rice and weeds, and can leave much to be gleaned from fields after the harvest.

At the end of clearing the field, Mom records who worked and their rate of pay for the day. 🌐





## Farm Fresh Snacks



While gathering the cut rice, Pi Sut found this black tarantula. He wrapped it in a teak leaf and saved it for a snack during the next work break.



Thais are fun loving folks. Soi and Pi Sut clown around for the camera showing how to eat “spider sashimi”.



Things got serious when Pi Sut became the spider snack chef (photos below).



The communal spirit is very strong in rural Thailand. Pi Sut shared his snack, taking a couple of legs for himself, and passing it around. Nid (above left) got a few legs. Ming (not shown) split the body and shared a part of it with Pun (above right).





Ming caught some grasshoppers and demonstrated his cooking skills. He made a bamboo skewer and quickly set them a'roasting. Carefully sampling his work, he shared it around the group.

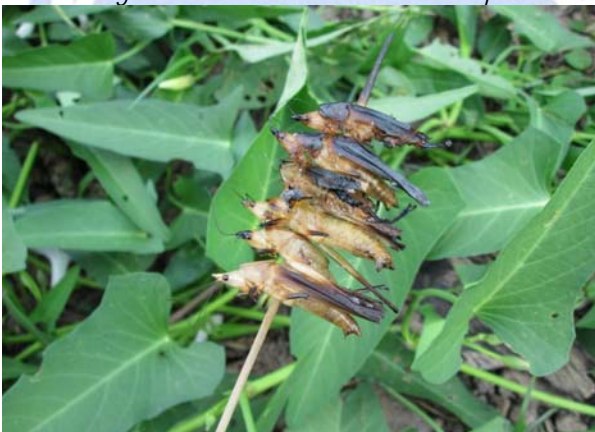
We coaxed Soi into modeling the farm fresh grasshopper snack while everyone was waiting for dinner. Lanna (northern) Thai people live very close to nature. Knowing this, you can readily understand they have a different approach to emergency preparedness and food stockpiling. They are surrounded by nature and natural foods. 🌍



*Ming made a bamboo skewer on the spot*



*Roasting grasshoppers: a light touch and keen eye*



*Grasshoppers: ranging from rare to well-done.  
There is something for everyone.*



*Soi, eating natural and re-using a plastic yogurt "cup" for an accompanying chaser for her grasshopper snack*



*Soi takes a break from cutting bamboo strips (for weaving) to enjoy a fresh grasshopper snack.*



## ***Dinner on the Farm***

The unexpected delay of the threshing crew meant we had to come up with dinner for the workers. Luckily some of them enjoy fishing. So they passed the time catching dinner. Green papayas are used to make a salad many Thais enjoy. Firewood comes from our orchards. Most of the dinner came from the farm. This makes it a sustainable event. Everyone took part in preparing and cooking dinner. What a difference from other workers in the world! 🌐





## Threshing Our Rice at Night

We expected the threshing crew in the afternoon (about 2pm). Our work crew had dinner at the farm. But by 5pm we started thinking of Plan B (cover the dried rice stalks with tarps to ward of dew and unexpected rain). They didn't arrive until a few minutes before 6 pm. That brought up another challenge; no lights for working in the field at night. We would be limited by the 2 lights on the threshing machine and rear light on the tractor. This raises the specter of increased risks of injury. The threshing machine uses a variety of long drive belts which are not all enclosed in safety cages. Rapidly moving parts combined with fatigue make for a potential mix of disabling injuries. (There doesn't seem to be a Thai equivalent of OSHA-Occupational Safety and Health Administration). There were no injuries.



*The late arrival of the threshing crew means a long night*



*The crew races to set up before dark*



*The work flows: right in, out from the left and rear.*



*Small pocket cameras are limited for night shots*



*A brief respite during machine adjustments*



*Available light shot of the left and back of the thresher*



*Night flash photo of chaff simulates "snow fall"*





*When things go smoothly, it takes about a minute to fill a 48 kg bag, tie it off, and stack it on the tractor.*



*By 10pm, 34 bags (~1.8 tons) of rice are dropped off and stored in our kitchen.*





A traditional family goal is to grow their annual rice supply. We lived off our wet paddy rice last year. Rice can be stored for a year under proper conditions (and perhaps a bit longer). We have 7.5 bags left over from last year. These will be eaten first, before the newly harvested rice. Last year we sold all of our dry land rice.

We still have the dry land rice on the Hill Top parcel and our wet paddy rice to harvest. 🌐

## ***Our Hill Top Dry Land Rice Harvest***



Our Hill Top parcel is about 5,653 sq m (a little smaller than the area for dry land rice on the farm). Other differences are: A) significant slopes on 2 sides; B) it is subject to high wind gusts that knock down some of the rice; C) there are no facilities on site. **[Note:** It would be nice to build a small structure with a toilet, rain water harvesting tank and radio mast.]



*The land has 2 mango trees and is bordered by 2 dirt roads, some teak trees, some clump bamboo.*





*One of the steeper slopes on the Hill Top*  
The cutting started near the central mango tree, then to the steep slope in the above photo, and counterclockwise around the Hill Top.



*The Hill Top as it appears in a 2012 satellite image.*  
*Steep slopes areas are inside dashed yellow lines.*



*Ah Pin and Pi Oi on the SW steep slope*



*Freshly cut rice laid out to dry*



*A view of the West side of the Hill Top (uncut rice to the left; cut to the right.)*



*On overview of our Hill Top from a neighboring hill ~0.2 km to the SW (Hill Top encircled in yellow).*  
The Hill Top has a good view of Ban Na Fa. It is also a excellent radio operating site with good line of site to both ends of the Nam Yang Valley. 🌐



## ***Threshing Our Hill Top Dry Land Rice***



Threshing day for the Hill Top began with clearing a spot to gather the dried rice and set up the threshing machine. The steep slopes made collecting the dried rice harder. We had 2 men and 3 women do the preparatory work.

The women gathered the cut rice into piles. The men gathered the piles into bundles and carried them to the assembly area. All the rice was gathered shortly after lunch. They had to wait for the threshing crew.



*Shortly after lunch, all the dried rice was gathered and waiting for threshing.*





*The threshing crew arrived about 3 pm.*



*The crew misjudged the wind so chaff came down on the bagging team.*



*Threshing was done in just over an hour.*



*The bags are carried off the Hill Top for transport home.*

Location	Sq m planted	# bags @ 48 kg			Tonnage	
		Harvested	Stored	Fee	Harvested	Stored
Farm	6,919	37	34	3	1.95	1.80
Hill Top	5,653	21.5	19.5	2	1.11	1.02

Our dry land rice harvest ended on 31 Oct. The summary table above gives the results for 2013. We still have our wet paddy rice to harvest later in November. It isn't over until it is over. So we will hold off on finalizing our 2013 rice production. 🌾

