



**Field Report**

***ESSI Thailand RTC Summer 2005 News  
(Rural Training Center)***

Vol. 1, No. 2

June 2005

84 Moo 2 Ban Na Fa, Jompra, Thawangpha City, Nan Province, Thailand 55410 Phone: (66) 054 705404

www.earthssystemscience.org

E-mail: earthssystemscience@yahoo.com

**Community-based Environmental Education for Families and Sustainable Neighborhoods**

## **LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATION**

ESSI operates on a people-to-people basis. In Ban Na Fa, our efforts start with the Head Villager. He relays the information to the Village Committee. This key link determines the local support for our efforts. The first hurdle was cleared last summer, 2004, when Saifon launched the REEEPP effort with Na Fa Elementary School. The major differences for summer 2005 are the home stay and sustainable agricultural practices.



*ESSI RTC-Thailand*



*Ban Na Fa Head Villager's home*



*Na Fa Elementary School*

The initial meeting with Mr. Jamnian Suttisan, the Head Villager outlined the operational details for the home stay. Numerous households have applied to host the American volunteers. A committee will be organized to review the applications and inspect the homes (according to ESSI standards) before selecting the host families.



*Mr. Jamnian Suttisan  
Head Villager*

For the summer 2005 program, the host families play an important role in the ESSI effort. The host families will undergo hands-on training in composting and non-toxic pest control. Each host family will have the chance to conduct a Teach Back session to the other host families. Then the host families will teach back to the Na Fa Elementary School teachers, who in turn, will teach back to the students. This is an example of the integrated nature of ESSI community-based environmental education programs. This integrated approach builds a long range foundation for future environmental stewardship.

Success of the program rests in the commitment of the participants. ESSI uses a mutual respect, mutual benefit approach to fuel a self-selection process. Program participants are motivated and committed to the project because of their perceived value of the ESSI program.

Essentially the participants are all volunteers. They are involved because they actively chose to get into the program. For many, they get back as much or more than they give. This is part of the synergistic output of community building and environmental stewardship and sustainable communities.

## HOME STAY INSPECTIONS

The safety and comfort of the American volunteers are important factors in the host family qualification process. Other factors include willingness to fully participate in the ESSI training activities and to teach back to others in the community. Families self-select to participate in this cross-cultural opportunity. Among the factors on the ESSI list:

- Clean bathroom
- Separate bedroom / area for the volunteer
- Mosquito net
- Telephone (for emergency contact with ESSI RTC-Thailand)
- Easy walking distance to the ESSI RTC-Thailand facility
- English-speaker / learner in the household
- A home garden or farm for sustainable practices demonstration and training



*Potential hosts are curious about the visitors.*

Volunteers need to be flexible and realize that conditions vary from home to home within the village. Although steps are taken to visit and inspect the host family home and facilities, the expectations of the volunteer are relatively unknown. Thai homes tend to have very steep, short step leading to second floors. Air conditioning is largely non-existent. Bathrooms could be western or Thai.

Numerous families had asked the Head Villager about being a host family. A committee will inspect the applicant homes and meet to decide on which families will serve as hosts. A major concern for ESSI is to have a fair selection process so that all interested families have an opportunity to participate. Photos will be taken of the families and homes. If time permits, these will be sent by e-mail to the volunteers to better prepare them for their visit.



*Interviewing families and inspecting homes of host family applicants are all part of the advance team duties.*

The home stay is a core component of the cross-cultural experience for both the ESSI volunteers and the local villagers. For the ESSI volunteers, there is the opportunity to see Thailand up front and personal by living with a Thai family. **[Note:** In many cases, even very good Thai friends have never been to each others home. So this can be a very rare experience indeed.] For the local Thais, this may be the first time they have actually spoken with a “foreigner.”

No plan ever goes 100% smoothly. Both sides are prepared that the other side may commit some social blunders. But both sides are prepared to be flexible, patient and ready to “forgive” the mistakes that may occur. The advance team set the pace by working out the basic ground rules and preparing everyone to keep an open mind and not to be too quick to judge others.

## TENTATIVE DAILY ROUTINE

Since the arrival of the advance team, daily temperatures have averaged about 28° C / 82° F with a relative humidity of about 92%! Although a tentative daily schedule has been prepared, the effect of the heat and humidity on the volunteers may be stressful. The schedules can be adjusted to avoid heat stress problems. Air conditioning is not an option. But electric fans and cool showers will greatly reduce the risk of heat stress. The ESSI RTC staff will be monitoring the weather conditions and posting appropriate advisories to the Project Leaders. As with all ESSI activities, flexibility is a key to success. Any volunteer that begins to feel the effects of heat and humidity should notify the Project or Team leaders for an adjustment in work schedule. **[Note:** Planned schedules may also be altered due to the planting season activities of host families and the continuing Thai government education reformation.]

The general plan of the day is as follows:

Morning	07:30	Assemble for Breakfast / Announcements	Plan of the Day is announced. Volunteers can choose to work at the school or in the community. They can change activities between morning / afternoon or from day to day.
	08:30	Leave for Activity Site	
	09:00	Start Planned Activity	
	11:30	Leave for Lunch Assembly	
Noon	11:50	Assemble for Lunch / Announcements	Feedback is important to make the lessons effective.
	12:00	Lunch & Review Morning Activities	
Afternoon	01:00	Leave for Activity Site	Resume work assignments for the day. Free time provided for volunteer and host family or rest.
	01:30	Start Planned Activity	
	04:00	Return home; Free Time	
Evening	05:50	Assemble for Cooking Demonstration	General updates & Plan of the Day for tomorrow is announced. Cooking demonstrations before dinner. Feedback for the afternoon activities during dinner. Free time after dinner.
	06:00	Cooking demonstrations	
	06:30	Dinner & Review Afternoon Activities	
	07:30	Free Time	

Although there is some street lighting in the village, volunteers are advised to always carry a flashlight (and extra batteries) especially after sunset. Streets can be very uneven, some are unpaved, and navigating in unfamiliar surroundings in the dark provides ample opportunities for unpleasant surprises.

Most meals will be catered by the local staff at the ESSI RTC facility. This will provide the Project staff an effective means of communicating the flexible work schedule during the stay in Ban Na Fa. Volunteers are able to alternate their time between the REEEPP projects at Na Fa Elementary School and the Sustainable Agriculture training activities. This can be done in a day (morning vs. afternoon) or between days.

### Tentative Menu (subject to change)

Volunteers will have dinner with their host family on 17 July. Host families will attend the banquet on 20 July with their assigned volunteer. The ESSI-RTC Thailand volunteer staff worked out a tentative menu for the homestay program. However, the menu is subject to change due to availability of ingredients and materials in the markets on a particular day. Weather can also be a factor in the menu selection as it may also affect market inventories.

Tentative ESSI RTC Menu				
	18 July	19 July	20 July	21 July
Breakfast	Ham or bacon, eggs, toast, coffee / tea, fresh fruit with various Thai breakfast sample options			
Lunch	Seaweed soup, cashew nut chicken, red curry pork, steamed rice, fruit or vegetable salad, Thai dessert	Green curry chicken, stir fried vegetables, son-in-law eggs, shrimp cakes, steamed rice, fruit or vegetable salad, Thai dessert	Wonton soup, Pad seeuw, khanom jeen, tom kha gai, steamed rice fruit or vegetable salad, Thai dessert,	Fish cakes, moo tod, kang curry gai, stir fried vegetables, steamed rice, fruit or vegetable salad, Thai dessert,
Dinner	Thai cooking demonstration (Khanom pang nhamu, Pad Thai)		Fruit carving & Thai cooking demonstration	Thai cooking demonstration
	Steamed fish, spring rolls, BBQ chicken, fried rice, fresh fruit, fresh fruit juice	Vietnamese spring rolls, chicken vegetable stew, chicken satay, steamed rice, fresh fruit, fresh fruit juice	Banquet: Northern Thai style dinner	Fried wonton, shrimp curry, stir fried vegetables with tofu, pla sam rod, BBQ pork, steamed rice
Beverages: Various is beverages and bottled water available at all meals.				

Before dinner, the local ESSI RTC staff has arranged cooking demonstrations. They wanted to provide the ESSI volunteers with a cross cultural experience that could be easily taken home to remind them of Thailand. Several “easy-to-prepare” recipes are planned for presentation along with fruit carving. **[Note: Na Fa Elementary School students have received numerous awards in fruit carving competitions. So there may be an opportunity to see some of those students in action. Be sure to have your cameras handy!]**

## KEY LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Head Villager also provided information about the key environmental problems in Ban Na Fa: overuse of agricultural chemicals and soil erosion. Chemical pesticide and agricultural chemical local water pollution is not well documented by scientific lab data. Some of the indirect evidence cited included:

- Farmers now carry drinking water to the fields, no matter how distance, because they no longer trust drinking water from streams.
- Fish caught in rivers and streams show increased evidence of disease and damaged skin.

- In some cases, foreign companies have come into Nan Province paying local farmers to produce specific crops through the heavy use of agricultural chemicals leading to increased water pollution and major environmental damage of the aquatic habitat.
- The heavy silt loads cause local rivers and streams to be a reddish muddy color. Clearing of hillsides to expand agricultural land leads to increased soil erosion. If those farmers are heavy agricultural chemical users, there will be increased chemicals in the water flowing off those slopes.

This type of local input provides ESSI with opportunities to create new environmental lessons or to locally adapt existing lessons. After the summer volunteer effort, ESSI Project Leaders will meet with the local ESSI RTC volunteers to discuss future efforts.

ESSI developed lessons for non-toxic pest control and soil erosion methods as key environmental lessons based on prior experience in Thailand. Composting was another approach to reducing the need for agricultural chemicals. For summer 2005, composting and non-toxic pest control methods are featured in both the Sustainable Agriculture training and the REEEPP Habitat project at Na Fa Elementary School. Figure 1 on page 2 of this paper shows how the ESSI community-based environmental education program integrates both sets of environmental training activities. This is all part of the overall “systematic” approach taken by ESSI. Community involvement ranges from individuals in families at the neighborhood level to the social institutions of the local village school and the Head Villager’s office. The Na Fa Elementary School faculty realize the critical role they play in educating the future farmers and community leaders. When you consider the significance that Saifon Lee, one of their former elementary school students, returns to personally implement this community-based environmental education plan, it is easy to understand why there is wide-spread community support for this project.