



Field Report

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

Vol. 1, No. 1

June 2005

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Community-based Environmental Education for the Self-Sufficiency and Sustainability of Small Rural Family Farms

Advance Team Arrives in Ban Na Fa

The advanced team for the ESSI Summer 2005 Volunteers arrived in Ban Na Fa on 18 June 2005. The trip began on 15 July with an ominous delayed departure from Los Angeles that threatened a possible missed connection from Osaka to Bangkok. This could cascade into a major disconnect in moving the advanced team from Bangkok to Ban Na Fa. Greg and Saifon Lee were bringing key equipment for the project. Local support teams in Ban Na Fa arranged for a pickup truck to meet them in Bangkok and transport the equipment to the village.

The delayed Japan Airlines (JAL) flight generated a flurry of messages within the company to coordinate the numerous passengers and families affected by the delay. JAL-Los Angeles contacted Osaka to try to coordinate arrangements for all passengers with connecting flights. JAL-Osaka notified JAL-Bangkok about the delay, informing them of the possibility that LA connecting passengers may be arriving a day later. Ban Na Fa coordinators contacted JAL to confirm the flight arrival but did not get a firm arrival time for the ESSI advanced team. When you realize it takes 12 hours to drive from the village to Bangkok, you can imagine the logistical headache in planning and coordinating.

[Note: The trans-Pacific flight from LA to Osaka took 11 ½ hours! What a difference in time/space scales!!]

As luck would have it, the trans-Pacific flight conditions were favorable allowing some make up of lost time. JAL also held the Bangkok flight to allow connecting passengers to transfer smoothly. The ESSI team wasn't sure their bags would arrive on time, but at least they could be on

the ground in Bangkok to link up with the local coordinators. About 4 ½ hours later, the team was on the ground in Bangkok, cleared passport formalities, and were surprised with the timely arrival of all baggage (consisting of 4 large bags, 2 medium bags, and 2 back packs). After clearing customs, the hunt was on to find the local coordinator and the truck. The arrival of at least 4 other flights about the same time added to the congestion and confusion in the terminal greeting area. About an hour after arrival, they met Mr. Wanchai Promwangkha (Pi Nit), loaded the truck, and decided to start the 12 hour drive north to Ban Na Fa.



This give a whole new meaning to the meaning of "pickup truck" when getting people to work.

The first half of the road trip was in darkness. Daylight revealed the green farmland of the Central Valley as the advance team moved northward. Traditional teak buildings could be seen in the region where teak is still legally harvested from cultivated "forests".





Teak buildings are becoming more costly due to the banning of logging in Thailand.

Summer is the start of the rainy season for Northern Thailand. This is the prime agricultural season for this region. As water becomes more available, wet paddy rice fields are prepared and planted.



The southwest monsoon dominates the summer weather pattern for northern Thailand. The mountains of Nan Province trend north-south. As hillsides are cleared for agriculture, soil erosion increases. The muddy rivers tell it all. Nan is troubled by alternating periods of flooding followed by droughts as the dry winter season brings winds from the NE.

Since arriving in Ban Na Fa, rain fell on 3 days out of 7! The Yang River (a small tributary to the Nan River) rapidly increased in volume overnight after rain fell.

The three photos below show the changing river levels in about a 24 hour period. The first photo was taken Thursday evening before the rain; The second photo about 7am Friday morning; The third photo about 6 pm Friday. Note the field in the upper right of the photos.



The rainy season can bring flood conditions to northern Thailand.



REEEPP: Program Review

A critical function of the ESSI advanced team was to conduct a program review of the first full year of REEEPP (Rural Environmental Education Enhancement Pilot Project) started in summer 2004. This review would be the vital feedback to refine the summer 2005 program. [Note: The summary report is available in a separate document available on the ESSI website.]

The advanced team met with the administrators and teachers of Na Fa Elementary School and got an annual summary of the 3 REEEPP projects:



The water buffalo is the traditional beast of burden. In northern Thailand, they have been replaced by small hand tractors.



The higher costs associated with tractors (e.g. initial purchase, maintenance, fuel, etc.) all add to the economic burden of small farm operations. This is another factor reducing the self-sufficiency of a small farm. Increasing debt often forces farmers to seek jobs in urban areas to support the farm.

In Ban Na Fa, increased use of agricultural chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers) also add to the costs of farming. It also adds to water pollution and environmental degradation. ESSI's volunteer program for summer 2005 focuses on composting and non-toxic pest control methods to help reduce the use of agro-chemicals and reduce the costs of small farms. This should help farmers regain self-sufficiency. 🌍



Green School introduced recycling. They started a small scale program, collected and sorted materials in an abandoned chicken coop.



They built a Habitat garden last summer and installed a fish pond. Some fish raised in the fish pond went to the school cafeteria; habitat gardening with a Thai twist.





"Your Big Backyard," donated by the National Wildlife Federation, is a prominent and favorite magazine in the English language section of the school library



Students gather around various Habitat project booklets. Lessons included basic English Habitat vocabulary as well as translation exercises based on nature articles from "Your Big Backyard."



NASA CERES S'COOL training began getting students familiar with recognizing and naming the different cloud types

The summer 2005 volunteer program will give teachers the chance to learn the more technical aspects of the project. If all goes well, Na Fa Elementary School may begin to file reports to NASA this summer.



A world map painted on a wall outside the classroom is one approach to geography using limited resources.



Saifon Lee (right) meets her former teachers, Mr. Witayya and Mrs. Duangnapha. REEEPP is the direct result of Saifon's desire to "give back to her community."

In spite of the current time consuming education reformation in Thailand, the Na Fa Elementary School administration and faculty have done a great job. The problems experienced in the first year of REEEPP involved the language barrier and limited / erratic Internet access. But the Na Fa faculty and the ESSI volunteers overcame these by sheer motivation and dedication. The entire school -- and village --- are very excited about the impending arrival of the ESSI volunteer group in early July. 🌐

