Impact of the SSNM Project on Some Farmer Leaders in Thailand

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Site-specific management technology was implemented initially in the maize growing areas of Thailand. It was subsequently modified to accommodate both rice and sugarcane production areas. The following examples highlight some of the early outcomes of farmer involvement with site-specific management techniques and practices for maize.

Sampan Yenwaree, the farmer leader from Nakhon Ratchasima province, represents the first example of our project's success in improving farmer living standards. In 2001, the Department of Agricultural Extension had given us support to train 200 farmers and 200 extension officers from 10 provinces in the corn producing area of Thailand. Sampan Yenwaree (Figure 1) was one among the 200 farmers who were trained on site-specific nutrient management in that year. In 2002-2004, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations supported our dissemination of technology by training 100 farmer leaders and 20 extension officers in the four corn-belt provinces of Thailand.



Figure 1. Sampan Yenwaree is a farmer leader from Nakhon Ratchasima and participates in sessions to share his experiences with other farmers.

At that time, we used the Participatory Learning Forum technique to empower the farmers and screen them. Mr. Sampan was one of 67 farmer leaders selected for training on sitespecific nutrient management technology and dissemination. Mr. Sampan had worked in a seed company before the training so he had experience of plant breeding. He started to use what he'd learned on his soils and used fertilizer management on his own land. During 2002-2004, we conducted training sessions for the farmers about four to five times and Mr. Sampan participated in every training session and told us that he would not miss a meeting because he learned a lot from us. He used a motorcycle to attend the first and second meetings, which were about 80 km from his house and didn't miss one meeting in 2002. From his training, including how to use the technology and techniques of self-reliance and decision making and how to form a farmer network, and his own tests on corn varieties, his corn yield was markedly improved while his costs of production were reduced (Figure 2). In 2003, he came to the meetings by pick-up truck, and in 2004 he came to the meetings by car and told us that he had bought 100 rai (16 ha) more land, as well as a plowing machine and one more pick-up truck. He now also grows organic vegetable for export. He was fortunate also that during this time no drought occurred in his area. Recently, the Bank of Agriculture and Cooperatives has invited him to be one of the lecturers disseminating the technology to various farmers in many provinces. He is the president of a corn producing farmer association with about 15,000 members in several provinces.



Figure 2. Yield and cost of corn production on Sampan Yenwaree's land.

Our second example is Kritchapat Srisongmoung (Figure 3), a farmer from Petchabun province. He was also one of the farmers who were trained in 2001. He has 300 rai of land for corn production. After the training he received in 2001, his corn yield doubled. From 2002-2005, he used the site-specific nutrient management technology and obtained a marked increase in yield. In the third year after joining the project, he was able to buy 34 rai (5.4 ha) more land, two small plowing machines, one big plowing machine and one pick-up truck. He invested about 300,000 baht this year on 80 rai of land, which will be used for diversified crop production. His reason for doing this is to increase his income, because in 2006 his profit with maize was only 1000 baht/rai, less than it had been the previous year, due to the increased price of gasoline. Interestingly, he invented the adjustable fertilizer applicator, in which the other farmers did not want to invest. There was no drought in this area.



Figure 3. Kritchapat Srisongmoung, in red rectangle, at a training session.

Our third example is Prakong Pinwiset (Figure 4) from Lop Buri province. Before 2001, he had debt, felt hopeless and wanted to die. After joining the project (2002-2004), not only did he eliminate his debt, but he also had deposited money in the bank. He has improved his soil with green manure and told us that his land was easier to plow than his neighbor's. He has 110 rai for corn production and he grows mung bean after corn every year. He divided his land area into three sites and planted rain-watered corn in each, one week apart, to avoid the drought and reduce his risk. He also grows bamboo and sells the bamboo shoot which gives him additional income along with the corn and mung bean. Although the cost of corn production increased last year due to an increase in the gasoline price, he still made a profit though not as much as previously.



Figure 4. Prakon Pinwiset refers to the specific nutrient management manual from Kasetsart University.

The fourth example is Prachak Sriprasert (Figure 5), a sugarcane farmer, who joined us for only one year. He has only 60 rai of land but he made some farmers a loan and they gave him 55 rai of land as a guarantee so altogether he has 115 rai of land. There have been amazing developments in his life. He had always worked very hard but still he had debt. After joining us he began using crop diversity with banana, dragon fruit, etc. so that his income was on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis. He sold his green sugarcane on about 53 rai after three months, so he had more time to work on his other businesses, like his noodle shop and selling insurance. He is pleased with more income from these businesses while still able to grow sugarcane and other crops. With the good idea he has now, he is happier since he does not work as hard as before and has a more stable income.



Figure 5. Sugarcane farmer, Prachak Sriprasert, who joined us for one year.

A fifth example is Sala Nirakorn, a farmer from Saraburi province (Figure 6). He was regarded as the 'soil doctor' by others and was a farmer leader before joining the project. As a result of his training and conducting a demonstration plot, Mr. Sala learned how to mix fertilizer to be used in his field. He now understands the role of NPK for plant growth and understands the difference between organic and inorganic fertilizers and has decided not to use ready-made organic fertilizer any more. His soil is a red soil with deficiencies in K and when he followed the site-specific nutrient management technology, the maize yield increased from 900 to be 1500 kg/rai. He has become the core person disseminating this technology to the entire sub-district and has already completed training in four villages. He told us he had been blind doing maize production for more than 20 years, but after receiving

training from us on soil and fertilizer technology, he began to see how to use this knowledge on soils and with fertilizer.



Figure 6. Sala Nirakorn from Saraburi province is called upon by other farmers as the 'soil doctor'.