CHAPTER III
THE PRODUCTION SIDE OF SAFE AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURAL NETWORKS: POWER AND FARMERS

Throughout Thailand, farmers, both conventional and certified, are organized into farm groups. Farm groups share resources, receive grants and aid from the government, and are recognized by the government as official entities. On the one hand, the association of farmers, as a network object, is a technology of the government, part of the governmentality to oversee the workings of Thailand's agricultural community. On the other hand the farm group is an outcome of Thai community society, a way for farmers to work together, cooperate, and help to assure the success of the community. This chapter will examine the various ways that farmer groups have come together to practice safe agricultural. The findings of this chapter come from over 80 interviews with Northern Thai farmers about their personal lives, interaction with the government and farming practice, as well as interviews with *amphoe* leaders, and interviews as well as site inspection with leaders of Swift Farms Company and their asparagus farmers in Sakeao, Northeastern Thailand.

This section will describe four different approaches based on different strategies used in the development of certified agricultural networks to disentangle the global, national and local discourse. While some agricultural policies and directives to demonstrate that the actions of the bureaucracy and institutions of Bangkok promote and construct globalizing and neoliberal network linkages, and particularly for the promotion "of large agribusiness and agro-industries through the intensive application of higher agricultural technologies rather than to pursue any genuine sustainable agricultural programs" (Nitasmai, 1997: 282), other policy actions describe an effort by the government to promote national and local objectives.

3.1 Symbolic Thai social relations

Thai community culture is defined as a complex set of interpersonal relations in Thai society, used in this research to refer to village life and livelihood. This research will look specifically at *krengchai* and *barami*, two Thai social practices relating directly to the establishment of agricultural commodity networks. These are complicated Thai relationships not easily operationalized within Western social theory. However, the power which they exert on Thai social relationships must be acknowledged, they operate as powerful discourse, imposing themselves on hierarchical relations deep within the Thai conscious. They are not as overt as patronage; there is rarely a trail of money, gifts or other quantifiable overtures.

The highest form of Thai social relations, *barami*, is reserved for kings, princes, and the most powerful of Thai leaders, such as Prem. It is the highest form of respect gained by both the meritorious deeds done in this life as well as those accomplished in previous lives. *Barami* is an accretive process; accumulated good deeds done constantly will become *barami* which is the power and ability to anything successfully and safely". In its highest ideal, *barami* is accumulated by the monarch for "the stability of the Thai nation" (Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1975: 38).

Performing *krengchai* results in doing actions that an individual may not want to do, but will do anyway because of the positive associations of the past and concern about the future of the relationship and what may be lost if the relationship ends. *Krengchai* may also be done to avoid an obligation, such as acknowledging fault and then deferring to the superior to correct the problem. In any case, both actors are responsible for *krengchai*, even in unequal power relations, because both parties must feel concern about the feelings and temperament of each other. *Krengchai* differs from *kreng-klua,* respect given because of fear of *itthipon*, meaning the power of force, whether good or bad, to control people.

Within an actor-network, krengchai can be evaluated as a discursive practice. That is, *krengchi* becomes a non-human actor within the commodity network, exerting influence and power, providing network order, and stabilizing network relations, depending on the situation in which it is deployed. Although it is clear that *krengchai* is used in unequal power relations, it is unclear as to how it reproduces a commodity network. The problem is that *krengchai* is situational and its outcome is

dependant on the context in which it is used. When looked a symbolically, it is a way to deploy implicit meaning without directly addressing the situation, *krengchai* provides legitimacy to social dominance and reaffirms network relations. However, the act of *krengchai* may be done to establish rapport, consent to an agreement, or it can even be subverted, creating a symbolic relations used for the personal gain (Yos Santasombat, 2008:45).The latter case of *krengchai* is most commonly used to force the other party into a socially awkward position whereby face is saved by relenting.

Another problem of understanding unique Thai social interactions has been the influence of globalization of social performances. Many new Western and other non-Thai ideas, interactions, and responsibilities have been introduced into Thai culture. As a result, acts of *krengchai* may be translated into new representations through unintended interpretations caused by shifting social structures (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002: 50-52). However, because of the lack of specificity with which *krengchai* is used, it can not be directly idealized by Western concepts such as social, symbolic, or cultural capital because it is not consistently performed within Western context. Though it may be used as means of initiating or sustaining a capital engagement, it may just as readily be used to avoid involvement or reject a material relationship altogether. The most important understanding a researcher must have of *krengchai* it is most often used to maintain a social structure of relationships, and in this case a commodity network, by maintaining the structure of relations, saving face, and avoiding conflicts. As integral parts of community culture, the role of *krengchai* is more crucial to maintaining social hierarchy and relations than to satisfy material relations.

Not having the experience of being Thai, I must trust the observations of Thai relating to Thai culture which is not historically rooted in Western industrial development, Christian morality and capitalist structures. From one Thai's perspective, the concept of karma underlies and governs all relationships" (Amara Pongsapich, 1985: 12). *Krengchai* occurs at a more broad social level, it is an action done out of respect for another, allowing Thais to move freely about their social lives without causing too much disruption while maintaining social order (Thinapan Nakata, 1987: 1982). It is meritorious in so much as it allows a Thai to stay on the middle path, a place of moderation and social acceptance. It is also symbolic, as hierarchies

are maintained through a body of discourse associated with an individual. This analysis will use the Thai personal attribute of "*chai yen*", meaning "cool-heartedness", as a goal which Thai actors hope to achieve by following interpersonal, social practices. *Chai yen* is associated with an emotionally stable person. The basis of *chai yen* is in the Buddhist ideal of equanimity and detachment, practiced by an individual who can overcome greed, anger, and ignorance (Chai Podhisita, 1998: 39-41). Having *chai yen* allows Thai people the peace of mind necessary to seek the higher personal levels of Buddhist enlightenment.

Conceptualizing *barami* and krengchai presents can not be fully explained by Bourdier's Marxist approach. Bourdier seeks to define social behavior as the result of economic relations based on class struggle and labor values. A research approach using either of these entry points into the "translation of cultures" encounters the "double subjectivity" of trying to subjectively encounter a new culture within the minds of the actors and then recontextualize those observations into a Western scientific framework (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002: 111). The scientific process can be said to increase the "atomization of modern life into subsystems and domains of purposeful, rational action" (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002: 151). Rational models block the discovery of the interconnectedness of persons, the aesthetic and sensory modalities of social communication, and the 'ultimate' concerns of human life…"(Tanabe and Keyes, 2002: 152).

> Now it is when we transport the universal rationality of scientific causality, and the alleged rationality of surrounding moral, economic, and political sciences with their claims of objective rules of judgment (which are in fact colored by special cultural and social presuppositions), and try to use them as yardsticks for measuring, understanding, and evaluating other cultures and civilizations that we run into the vexed problems of relativity, commensurability, and translation of cultures…" (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002).

By bounding Thai social relations within terms of Western scientific methodology we take away their reference to Thai social discourse. The meanings become confused, and twists upon what Foucault described as discourse's "power to say something other than want was actually says, and thus to embrace a plurality of

meanings" (Foucault, 1972:118). The power deployed within Thai relations, using social practices such as *barami* and *krengchai*, is misrepresented outside the field of Thai sociologies, apprehended by sociologies of domination, rationalization, and class struggles. For example, within the non-academic, Thai Buddhist literature the values associated with all forms of accumulation is seen to lead to wastefulness and away from contentment (Acariya, 2005:425). The "middle path" has been evaluated as the concept of "middle way economics" whereby a person seeks to consume "just enough" to achieve "right livelihood" (Payutto, 1992).

Although I have lived continuously in Thailand for over five years, I have only now begun to understand some of the more subtle aspects of Thai social relations. I delved deeper into this topic by interviewing to a senior monk at the Wat U-mong monastery in Chiang Mai. Bikkhu Nirodho's competency in English, as well as his interpersonal relations with Thai people as a monk provided me with a unique insight capable of bridging Western expectations and Thai values. The one caveat in the interview was that he could only respond to relationships in regard to the symbolic role as a monk, and the observations he has made, from a Thai Buddhist perspective, of Thai people.

For Thai people, the saffron robes of a monk represent the teachings and philosophy of the Buddha, the man beneath the robes is an individual who is regarded as someone following those teachings. The monk is a symbolic representation of Thai Buddhist values and can attain *barami* as well as receive *krengchai*. The term *barami* comes from the Pali word parametus meaning perfection, stemming from the ten perfections of Buddhism. The king, as a damaraja, is thought to be born with these perfections. The king can gain or lose *barami*, as those who rise to power and monks. *Barami* is inherently meritorious; it can only be gained by selfless acts whereupon there is no expectation of compensation. It is a relationship of the one to the many; the possessor is considered to have a "moral authority" in society, capable of guiding the action of others without the use of force.

According to Bikkhu Nirodho, *krengchai* is a rule of Thai behavior, it "masks over social competitiveness by allowing people to step aside, to defer, bringing stability and harmony to the social classes." Western societies depend on the rule of law, on policy and government, as well as the use of force to enforce social

behavior. Historically this was not the Asian Thailand where the power of authority diminished with distance from seats of power (Thongchai Winichakul, 1994). Thai social customs provided an alternative to the use of force by internalizing responsibility as a "compulsion" to do the right thing.

As stated earlier, *chai yen*, as one example of Thai personal feeling, helps to describe the "primacy of subjective experience" in the daily lives of Thai people, compared to the objectivity of people living in Western capitalist society. This is not to say that Thailand is not an emerging capitalist nation, but that its historic development was not based on material culture, but on a Buddhist sensibility of impermanence and death. This unique characteristic makes have a "well developed sensitivity about personal feelings."

Barami does not fit well with the definition of symbolic capital. The person with *barami* has symbolic authority, though not necessarily the symbolic power associated with Bourdieu's analysis. The terms capital and power misinterpret the intent of Thai practice. *Barami* is not deployed for purposes of symbolic violence or, at least not in the intention of the possessor, for personal gain. In so much as the *barami* extended to an individual or organization may result in personal gain is a secondary effect, a transmutation of the power of the possessor into a new form of power, and now within the capitalized nation-state that power becomes transformed into capitalist modes of production.

Barami, as symbolic moral authority, enters into an actor network, such as the agricultural commodity network in Thailand, as one individual's desire to do good things. The Thai social discourse associated with *barami* empowers an institution with honor and respect. However, with the extension of global economy and the advocacy of neoliberal, rationalizing views into Thai society, *barami* becomes part of the corporate discourse of domination within Thai political economy. It subverts into *krengklua*, defined as the force derived from fear (Simmons, 2003: 79). Once subverted, *barami* can become an unquestioned force used for developmental projects and capital accumulation.

Krengchai is a symbolic, interpersonal practice internally experienced by Thai people. Thai social network depends on the performance of *krengchai* for the maintenance of harmony and stability. It can not be idealized as social nor symbolic

capital, insomuch as *krengchai* is situational, its forms and purposes vary depending on the circumstances between actors of different power relations. However, *krengchai* is used to distinguish between social classes and maintain class structure. It is performed but not accumulated, as it is based on what has already been achieved. Within an actor-network, *krengchai* facilitates cooperation between the giver and the receiver. It may be seen as a key to unlock a point of passage between networks; it brings down barriers of resistance and allows for compromises between actors of different levels of power and authority. Failure to perform *krengchai* leads to mistrust, misunderstanding, and disloyalty. The performance of *krengchai* is troublesome for foreign corporations in Thailand. Whereas *krengchai* may be given and received by individuals within the corporation, it is not a practice of the corporation itself. When the obligations of *krengchai* affect the bottom line, the corporation ceases to function as a collective of individuals and responds as nonhuman entity. Furthermore, *krengchai* is often cited as as an impediment to communication within corporate culture because it interferes with the ability of subordinates to communicate clearly with their superiors (Thinapan Nakata, 1987: 182).

Proper action is a sign of personal integrity, the loss of control is considered a sign of ignorance (Chai Podhista, 1985: 40-41). The proper flow of power in a village is associated with proper behavior, social status, and living in the right way, following the middle path and practicing self-discipline. *Krengchai*, in its most extreme sense, has been translated as "inhibition" for acting against a superior (Mulder, 1985: 63). This definition, promulgated by a foreigner, falls short of explaining the complexities as to why a Thai would limit their actions. *Krengchai* has also been described as an act of saving face by avoiding embarrassments, intrusions, or awkward obligations (Thinapan Nakata, 1987:182). An actor receiving *krengchai* avoids the use of force and domination, and all of the activities described as "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985) because the actors giving *krengchai* willing perform their duties and service. *Krengchai* contributes to the need to maintain respect and social harmony.

The complexity of krengchai makes it a "slippery" concept to define. It has so many different meanings and practices depending on the situation in which it is practiced. However, my field experience has led me to conclude that a researcher

must be aware of the complexity and subtlety in which Thai relationships are conducted. Therefore, agreements made between farmers and assemblers must be analyzed with respect to the multiplicity of reasons underlying the agreements, to include *krengchai* and *patronage*.

3.2 Categorizing network strategies

Regulated, safe agriculture production processes require long-term commitments and the establishment of interpersonal relationships between farmers and leaders. The strength of non-human actors, certifications, and cultural practices, shapes these networks into communities, making them durable through responsibility and respect. Successful farm groups are bound by more than the material relations of production. They are bound by interpersonal relations and village life. They survive crisis and hardship through self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and team-work. Certified agricultural production processes offer a framework on which farm groups can develop through the initiative of local leaders. Certified networks strengthen community bonds and allow for unique Thai interpersonal relationships, such as patronage and *krengchai,* to acts as non-human actors, strengthening the network through community relations. Safe agricultural production brings farmers together for a common purpose to meet the needs of a particular market. But the rewards are more than simple monetary remuneration. Farmers benefit from all of the other elements of co-production offered from a healthy farm environment. Foods, health, and village life come together in a community culture, a point which will be further elaborated in the following chapters.

Recent research has categorized the Northern Thai farmer as economically "flexible." This particular analysis, promoted by the Regional Center for Sustainable Development focused on the livelihoods of entire village communities and how Thai national agendas and globalization are mitigated and utilized by Thai peasants. I drew much insight into conceptualizing the Northern Thai farmer from this analysis. Peasants are presented as complex subjects, with rich lives filled with many social and economic activities (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 33). "Flexible peasants" employ many skills and engage in multiple occupations to obtain livelihood. (Yos Santasombat 2008: 171). Flexibility is explained as adaptability, effective use of local knowledge,

material and cultural relationships with cultivars, sustainability and "sufficiency economy" approach of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej[11] (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 134-135). My investigation will use the idea of flexibility as part of the overall description of Northern Thai farmers. Flexibility is an outcome of what has already been discussed as adaptable community culture. Farmers have had to adapt their way of life to the many new conditions brought to them through neoliberal economics and globalization. These adaptations include combining local knowledge with new production processes, such as the use of organic, pesticide free or pesticide reduced regulations and techniques. Agricultural flexibility has allowed many Northern Thai farmers to maintain their farms and customs while engaging in the national and global economy.

Chiang Mai's farmers have had to adapt to the many changing conditions brought on by national policies implemented by the Thai government. Chiang Mai was designated as a principal growth center for Northern Thailand in the 5th NESDP. The plan projected that through city investment, Chiang Mai would become a center for "commercial and industrial agriculture for local consumption and foreign exportation." Neoliberal plans were underway to work in partnership with private industry to "reorganize farmer production plan to respond to market needs" as well as for centralized markets and packaging standards. Researchers characterized Chiang Mai's growth at that time as "instantaneous" and called on many immediate measures to control the booming social and environmental problems. There was concern for the "employment of inappropriate production technology" leading to the destruction of the original body of knowledge, encouraging technological dependence." Researchers understood that unregulated growth through neoliberal policies would put an end to Chiang Mai's traditional way of life. (Chakrapand Wongburanvart, 1996: Sec 1, pg 4, Sec 3, pg 1).

3.3 Conceptualizing the global, national, and local

[11] Sufficiency Economy is a set of tools and principles to help communities, corporations, and governments manage globalization by maximizing local benefits while minimizing the costs. It is a way of by making wise decisions that promote sustainable development, equity, and resilience against shocks (Priyanut Piboolsravut, 2004a).

The northern Thai region is becoming increasingly integrated into the global network. As a result, the local community, its social networks and physical elements, are become capitalized both in relation to external economic forces and perceptually by the local community. All cultural objects, from village culture and local knowledge, and physicality, particularly land values but also including local, uncultivated herbs, have been rendered a utilitarian value and are becoming commoditized in their relation to the nation-state and to the global economy (Fiona and Mackenzie, 2005: 97). The forces of globalization is conceived as one aspect of a localized site, to the extent that people in any given zone of interaction act within the parameters of policies, authorities, and material conditions that have sources outside the reach of immediate local networks (Fiona and Mackenzie, 2005: 10).

Globalization "depends upon the interweaving of situated people, artifacts, codes…" and all other non-human actors (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 288). Though globalization is often referred to as "imposed", it must be "brought in" at some point, either by direct pressure through larger institutions such as the Asian Development Bank or IMF, or by local actors seeking personal gain. There is not one overarching globalizing force. Instead, globalization can be conceived of as "multiple globalising projects" which "intersect, modify, or contradict one another (Gouveia, 1997: 309). Within the post-colonial debate, the global and the local are often polemicized as "the West" to "the rest" (Gupta, 1998: 24), a term stemming from the center-periphery arguments used to describe former structures of colonialization.

Global, neoliberal policies, based on fundamental capitalist market ideals, advances capitalism's need for a "spatial fix", which is envisioned as the incessant demand of corporate economies to develop new markets for expansion. The capitalist model is inherently unsustainable without expansion. Neoliberal attempts at sustainability are inherently flawed due to the nature of market dynamics (Harvey, 2000: 25-27). In a purely Marxist sense, globalization leads to an international labor market where global surplus values can be extracted, as well as global differentiation of commodity profits may be attained (Harvey, 2000: 109). In the case of Thailand, capital seeks the low wages of Thai labor while, at the same time, markets late-model items no longer desired in their country of origin. The domination of global

capitalism in Thai society can be seen as the transformation of self-expression into commodities, therefore “love of nature” becomes “ecotourism” (Harvey, 2000: 237) and local vegetables become finely packaged, supermarket commodities.

The global and the local fall into the ever expanding list of paradoxical relationships with the post-modern paradigm. One form of globalization is “government through community” whereby the community is transformed into a paradox of something that exists within the definition of how it is to be improved by the work “trustees”, defined as experts whose advice is to be trusted for future development (Li, 2007: 232-233). Therefore the community is an ongoing project, an unattainable destination in process of becoming. Government technologies, promoted by its trustees, allow urbanization to overwhelm the landscape as one set of improvements supercedes another. Thailand’s ongoing experiment with democracy highlights these technologies, where village residents are allowed to vote for local representatives while the governor and the bureaucracy, with overwhelming control of the social-political agenda, are appointed by the central government.

Neoliberalism, in its most benevolent form, attempts to bring environmentalism and social justice into quantifiable attributes, which in effect, commodifies them as consumable units in the marketplace. For example, the policy of reconversion is a neoliberal approach to maintaining family farms in Brazil. Traditional farms, considered to be inefficient, are transformed into specialized farms linked to larger commodity networks (Wilkinson, 1997: 39). Milk production is cited as a successful example of reconversion, though limited in its market capacity. In the northeast of Thailand, the neoliberal concept of agricultural efficiency has led to large tracts of land are being converted into eucalyptus plantations. Unfortunately for locals, the economies of scale required are too great for small farmers, who sell their land to large investors. On the other hand, large-scale, organic commodity networks have allowed small farmers to switch to the production of organic baby corn in Mae Tha, adjacent to Chiang Mai. Reconversion projects are successful as long price stability is maintained and market demand exceeds supply.

During this investigation I found that the dichotomy between local and global is further mediated by national networks. The gradient of translations of ideas is vast within Thai society. Global agendas are intercepted by actors protecting Thai

nationalism, from the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, to name a few. Global actors, from international businesses to NGOs, must be approved and adhere to the rules of Thai society. Both global and national ideas are met by local civil society, as well as the individual actors with the corresponding networks. This example demonstrates that there is no direct local to global conduit, rather, there are numerous interlinked networks connecting the local, national, and global agendas together, each imparting discursive objects to the many debates within agricultural commodity networks. Therefore, there is no dichotomous relationship; rather, the relationship of alternative agricultural commodity networks will be examined as gradients of translations between the networks supporting specific regulatory regimes of agricultural production practices.

Chiang Mai's rural farmers are being resituate into new class structures through the translation of global and national identities associated with the capitalization of the rural landscape (Rigg, 1997).

> "Few peasants in the world are untouched by a market and by a pricing mechanism that determines the value of their products, labor, and capital" (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 16).

Traditional Patron-client relations are weakened with the intrusion of global economic power. However, there is argument that the introduction of global markets further empowers patrons and the more powerful peasant classes to exploit traditional economic relationships for personal gain (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 19). State patronage, as acts of governmentality overseen by trustees (Li, 2007: 3-10), directly influence the social networks of rural economies (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 21-22). In Thailand, rural elites act as state proxies for domination of the agrarian based population. Acting as privilege patrons, the rural elites have unprecedented access to land, resources, credits, price controls, and all other state services. The elites embed themselves into the state structures, placing family members into government positions further entrenching their control over the local economy.

Thai rural peasantry uses patronage as a way to limit the negative affects of unequal power relations on their personal lives. Using subtle relationships between community members and powerfully positioned actors, Thai have developed highly

complex, multithreaded and personalized social networks (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 46). By using *krengchai*, power is diffuse at the local level. "Patronage is a social organization with which peasants adapt to the pressures of the outside world" (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 17). Combined with new opportunities afforded through education and aptitude for flexibility, the northern Thai farmer has self-stratified into a broad spectrum of economic options. From contract farming, urban professionals, and landless wage-earners, the Thai peasantry has undergone a social realignment whereby the most deleterious consequences, as experienced by their global counterparts, are being mediated by the complex social structures within Thai village networks (Yos Santasombat, 2008: 47).

The rural Thai peasant is in the process of transforming into a heterogeneous group marked by "occupational diversity, large-scale migration, and the spread of consumerism and global culture." The Thai rural landscape can not be envisioned as a single class of peasant farmers or subsistence agriculturalists. While the role of class, as a measure of economic stability, can not be discarded, other roles, other indicators, such as "popular identities and social movements" must be considered in an analysis. (Yos Santasombat. 2008: 27-28). My research identifies the northern Thai peri-urban farmer as being flexible[12], that is, to have many different occupations, middle age, having secure tenure to the land, and as certified, being a member of a social movement aligned with alternative agricultural production processes.

3.4 Peri-urbanism and the agrarian question

My research is directed to understanding the problems encountered by Thai farmers living around Chiang Mai in participating in certified agricultural commodity networks. The initial problem in conducting my research was to identify the spatial boundaries of "around Chiang Mai." The area around Chiang Mai is rapidly diversifying into many different forms of typical urban economic activity interlaced

[12] Flexible refers to the ability of farmers to adapt livelihood strategies in response to changing environmental and economic conditions. Flexibility is an outcome of farmers participating in "learning societies" where "complexes of local knowledge, practice, technology, and germplasms" are exchanged between villages and ethnic groups (Yos Santosombat, 2008: 31-34).

with what is generally thought of as rural agricultural production. The problem here is to accurately describe the within the Thai context of urban-village life and the greater process of agrarian transition. Within the Western ordering of human landscapes, rural is generally categorized as being dominated by extensive land use, particularly in agricultural and forestry, lower order settlements characterized by buildings used for agriculture (farm houses, silos, etc.) and a way of life typified by rural identities (Cloke et al., 2006: 21-22). The United States government defines rural as a fact of population density, contrasted with non-rural, non-metropolitan and metropolitan areas (Marini and Mooney, 2006). These, of course, are generalized social constructions.

Many researchers use the concept of peri-urbanism, formally known as “desakota,” to define the region of interlaced economic activities associated with urban and rural livelihoods. These terms come from research conducted by Terrence McGee who described desakota as agricultural areas that have undergone an intense mix of settlement and economic activity, comprising agriculture, industry, housing development, and other land use. Throughout this dissertation, contemporary term “peri-urban” will be used to refer to “desakota.” The peri-urban model describes an urban economy based on tertiary economic activities such as small venders, hawkers, trishaw drivers, and government officials creating a condition of "shared poverty.” He notes that Gerald Breese, in 1966, referred to this condition as "urban subsistence" (Mcgee, 1967:18).

This dissertation begins with a polemic between the forces of globalization, introduced as a “neoliberal agenda” and those who participate in local, alternative agriculture. This juxtaposition baits a question about the efficacy of conceptualizing the rural landscape within the framework of “the agrarian question.” One hundred years ago the agrarian question was concerned primarily with the potential political capacity of peasant farmers. Proponents of Marxism were concerned that rural peasants would not join with urban workers in overthrowing bourgeois capitalist regimes. Karl Kautsky has been posthumously credited for beginning the debate on the agrarian question. In 1899, he stated that “capital, and in what ways is capital, taking hold of agriculture, revolutionizing it, smashing the old forms of production and of poverty and establishing the new forms which must succeed” (Kautsky, 1980:

46). This question, when viewed sympathetically by its supporters, envisions impoverished, rural peasants longing for emancipation from capitalist-industrialist overlords. However, the same question can be interpreted within neoliberal parameters as to whether or not the process of market forces can make agricultural more efficient, thereby freeing the peasant from the burdensome pursuit of field labor, allowing the individual the capacity to participate in modern society.

The agrarian question has been restated in many ways. As a moral argument, the perspective of this question is framed as "those changes in the countryside of a poor country necessary to the overall development of capitalism and its ultimate dominance in a particular national social formation" (Byres, 1991: 27). Capitalism dominates the politics, production, and accumulation and flows of surplus, preventing the democratization of the rural peasants into a socialist system. But this heart-felt calling for social freedom is also a paternalistic value judgment whereby authoritative elite has chosen a particular developmental pathway for the subaltern class. Thailand presents tremendous difficulties for neo-Marxist analysis. Of course there is exploitation of the countryside, not only in Thailand, but in the surrounding socialist and communist states as well. But Thailand's rural farmers are not a homogenous, uneducated, and suppressed mass. Instead, there exists in Thailand a long-established system of social checks and balances, a form of participatory democracy with universal suffrage for the citizenry, and an emerging middle class throughout the country with goals and aspirations struggling not with emancipation from exploitation, but with the reconciliation of Thai cultural values and desire for the affects of global society.

The peri-urban, as a function of the agrarian question, in most cases, does not march across the rural landscape uninvited. Although there are many documented cases where developmental projects are forced on local communities, they pale to the past socialist agricultural experiments in the former Soviet Union and communist China. They are not justifiable, but they are also not the norm. Sometimes the agrarian question is conceived of as "self-exploitation." The farmer utilizes unpaid family labor and surrenders unpaid surplus value to maintain a rural livelihood (Watts and Goodman, 1997: 8; Raynolds, 1998). The agrarian question is also restated in terms of the role of the state, acting as an agent of global capitalism, using political

power in the form of policies, regulations, restrictions and other governmentalies to dominated the landscape for economic gain (Pinkaew Laungaramsri, 2001: 163-163; Agrawal, 2005: 5, 232).

But when the agrarian question is applied to peri-urbanism it fails to comprehend the complexity of rural farmers and urban settlers. The broad brush strokes of Marixst review paint out the details of peri-urban livelihood. "There is nothing new in choosing to see the work in a microscope and not a telescope. As long as we accept that we are studying the same cosmos, the choice between microcosm and macrocosm is a matter of selecting the appropriate technique" (Thrift, 1996: 77). The neo-Marxist paradigm is too reductionist in its past form. Social networks can no the reduced to class, capital and accumulation. The fullness of Thai social life can not be described as an outcome of capital's compulsion for extracting surplus labor value. However, the question can be interpreted within an actor-network framework as negotiated and flexible strategies of different actors seeking different trajectories of social discourse in the fulfillment of their goals. The concepts of flexibility and negotiation have been well developed in the literature (Marsden and Murdoch, 2006; Yos Santasombat, 2008).

In social science, a trajectory is a series of events associated with some activity. These events may be considered to be "opportunities" to be taken by actors. These opportunities are situated in space and time. After a decision is made the trajectory moves forward in time until a new opportunity, risk, or event comes along. Previous points are relics of past events on which assumptions about the future may be made depending on the strategies deployed by the actors (Certeau, 1998: 35). The conceptualization of trajectories allows us to visualize how actors choose among different opportunities to accept different ideologies and engage in different practices, resulting in everyday life, as seen in the same speculation by Gillian Hart (1989: 56).

The juxtaposition of the rural farmer and the urban commuter as individual, competing actors can not withstand deep analysis. The rural household is much more complex, consisting of individuals involved in many social occupations (Mwangi wa Githinji and Cullenberg, 2003: 15-16). Within the post-modern context, rural environments are seen as hybrid, abstract space produced by the capitalization of the landscape, defined by modes of economic production and political policy (Marini and

Mooney, 2006: 22). Governance is seen as a key indicator of rurality, particularly government regulations limiting or specifying particular forms of land use form which complex social class structures arise. Within the West, the "interlaced social networks of residents and contesting political agendas" are generally not constituted by farmers and rural peasants, but by a complex social class structure of urban commuters or those whose occupations are urban related (Castree and MyiLibrary, 2005: 174-181). Peri-urbanism is a form of urbanization described as a spatial redistribution of urban economic activities occurring along an expanding developmental infrastructure. The advance is called the "urban field" made up of specialized centers of urban activities (Dematteis, 2001:117). Within a neoliberal context, the peri-ubran is a natural expression of minimum government intervention and market orientation. In the West, the social-political forces relating to social-democratic politics and social-market forces counter free-ranging peri-urbanization through the adoption of government olicies relating to social-fairness, sustainability, and other interventions (Scott, 2001).

The problem is that peri-urbanism, also known as peripheral urbanization, is deterministic and lacks a clear procedure to understand the elements of social and economic networking (Knox and McCarthy, 2005). Peri-urbanism is a description of the outcome of a social-political-economic process, but it is not a process itself. One possible solution is to look at periurbanism as an extension of a larger urban model, which from a neo-Marxist approach can be described as:

> "Capital circulation, the shifting flows of labour power commodities and capital, the special organizations of production and the transformation of space-time relations, the movement of information, geopolitical conflicts between territorially-based class alliances, and so on…" - David Harvey (Brand and Thomas, 2005 :98).

The peri-urban landscape can also be said to undergo a transformation similar to that described in debase concerning the capitalization of nature and the environment. Consider the following two descriptions of capitalist discourse on the representation of nature:

> "As the term is used today, 'environment' includes a view of nature from the perspective of the urban-industrial system. Everything that is relevant to the functioning of this system becomes part of the environment" (Escobar, 1996: 52).

The central problem is not "the environment" but the problem of space. An ecosystem, once broken up, cannot reconstruct itself. Once even a fragment disappears, then theoretical thought and social practice have to recreate a totality (Lefebvre, 1976:27).

The same issues can be directed toward the impact of urban expansion into the rural landscape. The transformation of livelihood around Chiang Mai can be described as a form of cultural displacement, by losing access to the means of livelihood (Vandergeest et al., 2007: 16). Agricultural livelihoods become fragmented. The existence of agricultural livelihoods is threatened by the expansion of urban-industrial processes and discourse. The rural discourse is swept away by ideological forms of urban subjectivity imposing new relations of production, social life, and cultural identity in once rural Thai villages. Urban ideologies, promoted by the state in the name of development, "mask critical social discourse" (Brand and Thomas, 2005: 118), rendering resistance to change ineffective and socially ostracizing.

As a descriptor, the peri-urban model fits with the observable facts of intertwined economic activities mingled along transportation corridors. However, the subjects of my study are not statically defined units driven by larger economic and political forces. The peri-urban model, as adapted within a post-modern framework, can be expanded beyond a linear consequence of urban expansion driven by neoliberal markets and politics. This research will follow a post-modern explanation of peri-urban as a social construct of negotiated strategies which can "only be encountered as its lived experience" (Dematteis, 2001: 224). Peri-urbanism has been advanced to describe a "hybrid mix of rural and urban practices" (Heikkila, 2002). Peri-urbanism in Southeast Asia presents a kind of misnomer as to what constitutes urban or rural activities and livelihoods. On the one hand, spatial forms, such as peri-urban space, are explained as being produced by the expressions and interest of the dominant class (Brand and Thomas, 2005: 98). While on the other hand, spatial

forms have also been described as not a reflection of society, it [space] is society" (Castells, 1983).

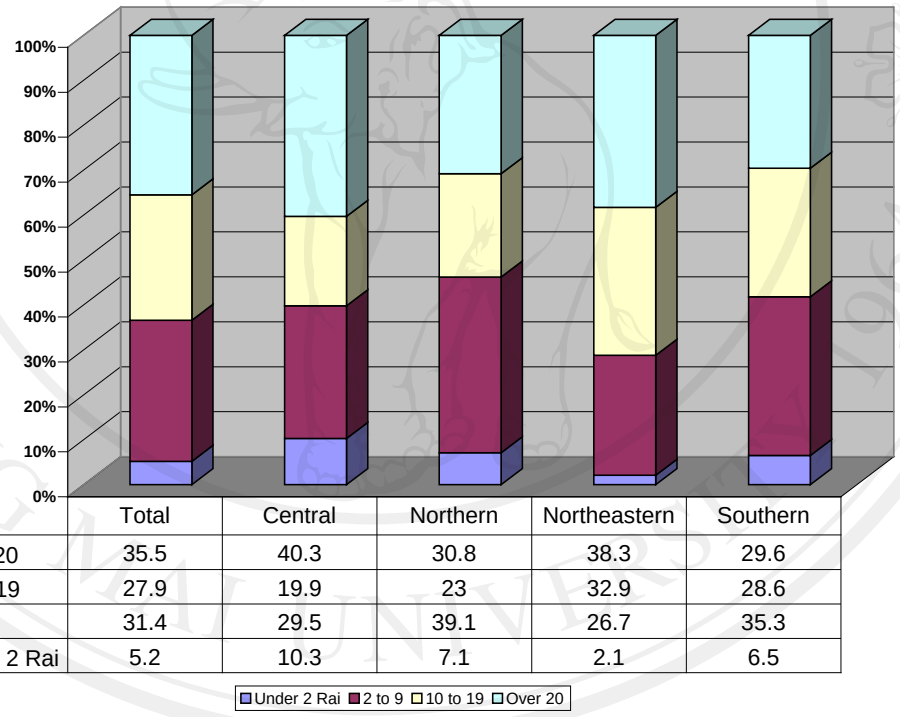
Within this context the peri-urban emerges as an actor-network of forces converging along the corridors of the periphery of the urban environment. Many forms of social, economic, and political discourse content for acceptance by the inhabitants of these intensely heterogeneous regions. Interest groups, discourse coalitions, and government agencies are not fully situated in camps of certainty, truth is contentious as global ideology and local traditions are neither fully accepted nor vociferously rejected. The fact is that residents within the peri-urban want the best of both worlds and the result is a compromise transforming the rural into a hybrid of social relations.

Actions by innovative individuals and government ministries penetrate into the social and cultural boundaries of Chiang Mai through safe agricultural discourse and community networks. Resistance to these network linkages is made through various local actor networks comprised of vegetable growers, distributors, and marketers, as well as NGOs and other components of civil society, each with different level of collaboration with neoliberal actors at the local and national level. When this proposal references Bangkok as a form of domination and subjugation it is not suggesting that the city and its inhabitants have willful intent for imposing their views on all of Thailand. How could this be? Bangkok is an amalgam of over 8 million official residents from all parts of Thailand. Domination occurs through the power elite, the bureaucratic structures, and those actors impose a discourse of modernization and liberalization on the villages and communities of Chiang Mai.

Agricultural regulatory decisions open entry points into the networks of international regulatory regimes, global markets, and the influence of neoliberal policies. The choice of regulation and the degree of participation provides access to different levels of access to organic marketing venues. Participation and collaboration lead to different sources of funding from government ministries, NGOS, and global and regional organizations. Chiang Mai farm groups remain relatively autonomous from Bangkok bureaucracy, at least as autonomous as an actor may stay while immersed in a landscape of policies and hierarchical social controls. NGOs can provide access to different sources of funding, allowing for the engagement of

alternative discourse. Autonomy may be seen as a form of resistance, maintaining a gateway through which regimes of discourse may be excluded or engaged. My research will attempt to show that there are no absolutes regarding collaboration or autonomy, rather there are degrees of engagement which establish social boundaries, excluding some elements of discourse while hybridizing others as permissible for inclusion.

The majority of Chiang Mai's farmers produce on farms between 2 and 9 rai in size. Chiang Mai has proportionally the greatest number of small farmers in Thailand. (Figure 3.1)



	Total	Central	Northern	Northeastern	Southern
Over 20	35.5	40.3	30.8	38.3	29.6
10 to 19	27.9	19.9	23	32.9	28.6
2 to 9	31.4	29.5	39.1	26.7	35.3
Under 2 Rai	5.2	10.3	7.1	2.1	6.5

Figure 3.1 Farm size as a percentage of all farmers

Source: National Statistic Office in Thailand, 2003 Census

Chiang Mai's inner city and suburban boom began in 1987. In 1996 Thai researchers noted many problems resulting from unregulated suburban building, and particularly problems associated with land fills, pollution, and flooding. Chiang Mai's population has grown quickly from 1,479,832 in 1995 to 1,649,457 in 2004, an average of about 1.2% per year, higher than the national average of 1.05%. Average farm income changed from 36,915 baht/yr in 1993 to around 38,000 baht/yr in 2003.

Debt has become a major problem for Thailand's farmers, with over 60% of all farmers being in debt on the average of almost 69,000 baht, or nearly two years agricultural income (Chakrapand Wongburanvart, 1996; National Statistics Office, 2003).

The ability to farm near the central city of Chiang Mai been severely curtailed by urban growth and the overall lifestyle of village life centered on farming has been put at risk. For this research, village refers to a place where people live together in a community distinct from other communities. The village became an administrative unit under Bangkok at the same times as Thailand became bureaucratize. All of these life practices are being displaced by a new urban discourse of boundaries, privacy laws, and sanitation codes. For many farmers it has been better to sell out than to face a degraded way of life. Agricultural changes in Chiang Mai are not entirely unique in Thailand. Large scale land confiscations, displacements of small-scale Thai farmers, the replacement of local crop varieties with HYV crops and large scale applications of agro-chemicals have been occurring throughout the country.

There is little incentive to certify if the farmer can not find a market in which to sell the vegetables. Without a specific market place or assemblers for certified vegetables, as part of a larger commodity network, offering a premium for farmer's vegetables, Chiang Mai farmers would have to sell at the central wholesale market. Muang Mai market is the central wholesale exchange for all locally grown vegetables in and around Chiang Mai. However, only uncertified vegetables are available at Muang Mai. Though Muang Mai specializes in uncertified produce, it is also an exchange for many local vegetables, both commercial grown and vegetables gathered by the fence, from the forest, and in the rice fields. Certified farmers, their assemblers or other distributors of certified produce will not go to Muang Mai unless they have an excess of product to be dumped into the uncertified market. Vegetables from Muang Mai will be bundled into smaller units and sold at fresh markets, supermarkets, hypermarkets and other commercial food outlets throughout Chiang Mai. (Figure 3.2) It may be assumed that the daily prices at Muang Mai constitute the lowest bulk price for vegetables in the city. It may also be assumed that the

vegetables at Muang Mai market were assembled from many farmers at the farm gate price, this being the price paid directly to farmers by assemblers.

Figure 3.2 Assemblers selling out of a truck at Muang Mai

Farmers wanting to sell certified vegetables must work outside of the uncertified produce network and find other wholesalers and markets in which to sell. To be profitable, they must sell at a premium above the farm gate price offered to uncertified farmers. The result is a higher value-added price at the final retail outlet. An investigation of vegetable prices was conducted to better understand the variation between wholesale and retail prices of uncertified and certified vegetables. The investigation was conducted during a single day to establish the market price of specific vegetables throughout Chiang Mai. Vegetable prices were obtained from Muang Mai wholesalers, RPF wholesale and retail price, MCC and ISAC retail prices, and fresh, super, and hyper market prices. In many cases, what appear to be certified vegetables were repackaged, uncertified vegetables from Muang Mai. Also, certified vegetables bought wholesale from RPF were repackaged and labeled with the private, equivalent certifications of individual resellers. Care was taken to carefully examine

the labels to be certain of the origin of the vegetables. At the time of this investigation only RPF could offer GAP certified wholesale vegetables.

Upland farmers participating in the RPF commodity network are paid a daily price above the farm gate price generally above the price for uncertified vegetables. RPF collection centers are conveniently located near upland villages, reducing transportation costs for farmers. However, they are not paid a contract price. Instead, RPF pays a floating spot price for vegetables. This price may fluctuate hourly depending on the supply of vegetables brought in by upland farmers. If two many vegetables are brought to RPF collection centers the price paid may fall below Muang Mai wholesale. At that time many farmers will transport their vegetables to Muang Mai and dump them on the uncertified market.

Farmers participating in the MCC or ISAC markets have the advantage of selling directly to the public. Their costs to sell include transportation and a minimum fee stall space. Community market farmers receive at least double the farm gate price for the vegetables. Farmers selling directly to a certified retailer, as in the case of the "Safety Vegetable" market in Chiang Mai, are on a contract price. This price is generally higher than the farm gate price given to RPF farmers and lower than the price received by MCC or ISAC farmers. The contract price is set for the year relieving farmers from price fluctuation. These farmers have an additional advantage of not incurring transportation costs or space rental.

The effects of the rapid growth and land speculation boom were described in an interview with Khun Pak Sod. As the coordinator of over 15 farmers in *Amphoe* San Sai, just north of the inner city of Chiang Mai, Khun Pak Sod had first hand knowledge of the harmful effects of new housing projects on agricultural fields. Many farmers sold their land to speculators, mostly from Bangkok, and either moved farther into the countryside or bought small homes around the city, ending their lives as farmers. Those who did not sell faced the deleterious effects of urbanization in the countryside. Community water resources were cut off as traditional waterways were blocked by urban residential areas. Khun Pak Sod's own irrigation water supply was cut off by the city in 2007 to eliminated free standing water around the expanding community of San Sai Noi. City interventions, such as stopping the flow of irrigation

canals, reduces the soil moisture content of farm areas adjacent to housing development and makes farming impractical.

There are basically four approaches by which farmers become part of a certified agricultural commodity network. These are corporate, governmental, institutional, and private. Each of these approaches emphasizes a particular initiative or objective based on the underlying beliefs, assumptions, and goals of the organizational actor. Each actor exerts power and influence on farm groups to meet specific objectives, including but not limited to a particular set of farming practices. These are the points of passage through which network objects, being agricultural and politics, social discourse and agricultural regulations pass from certifier to producer. The four points of passage into regulated organic commodity networks will be discussed as the following approaches:

- Corporate: Economic domination and control of production and distribution
- Governmental: Economic domination and social control, control of distribution
- NGO: Economic cooperation, social agendas, control of distribution
- Private: Economic cooperation, community based, control of distribution

The next section will detail these approaches through case studies of specific agricultural actors in Thailand.

3.5 The corporate approach

The corporate approach for establishing organic commodity networks is successful because all of the activities can be established by a single actor. The Swift Company, Ltd., also known as Swift Farms, is based in Nakorn Pathon. Production occurs at farm sites located near its headquarters, in the North-east near Sakeao and in the North in Chiang Dao, Chiang Mai province. Swift Farms brought together many different actors under a single authority to establish its network. The company contracted with the government for land, foreign importers, and local government to access potential farmers, and certifiers to assure that farmers are adhering to

internationally acceptable standards such as BSC and GlobalGAP[13] standards. Swift Farms sells to a global market, shipping to the United Kingdom, the Middle East, Japan, and Australia. Swift Farms has established a cold chain[14] throughout its operation. Products are bar-coded at collection centers to maintain authoritative chain of custody[15]. (Figure 3.3) In summary, Swift Farms oversees all aspects of production and distribution, contracting with local farmers to cultivate specific agricultural commodities under strictly controlled conditions.

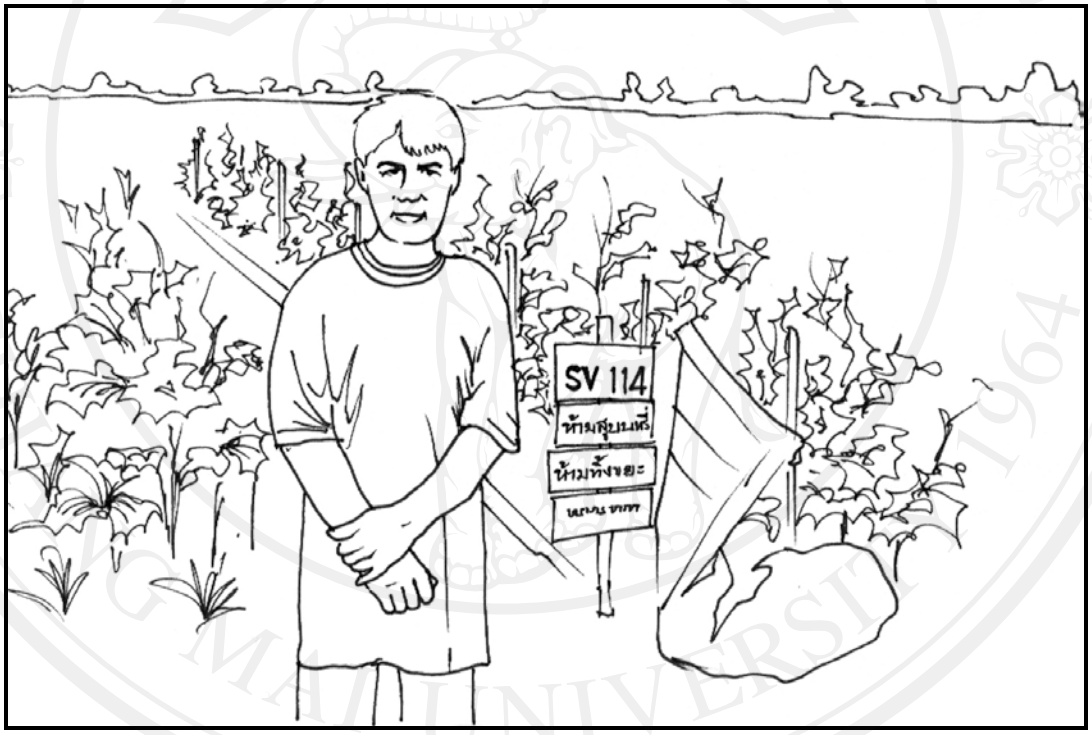


Figure 3.3 Example of chain of custody at farm in Sakeao
(Note the field identification number. This will be carried on bar code strips all of the way to packaging.)

Swift Farms is a complex economic actor as it engages in more than simple contractual arrangements with its farming communities. The corporation adheres to a policy called "corporate social responsibility," offering many incentives to its

[13] GlobalGAP is the new name for the former EuroGAP standards of Good Agricultural Practices.
[14] A cold chain is a temperature-controlled supply chain.
[15] Chain of custody refers to a documented chronology of control and transfer of goods.

employees such as medical services, scholarships, over-time payment and interest free loans. It would be too judgmental to suggest that Swift Farms engages in promoting local communities to meet consumer demands for social justice. However, the organic marketplace values issues of social justice and corporate responsibility. Swift Farms can be proud of its contribution made to the communities establish by the corporation. But Swift Farms, Inc. relies on the global market place. No one in Swift Farms is going to suggest that their farmers are self-sufficient. Swift Farms, and subsequently its farmers, rely on export sales, without which there would be no revenue.

I was invited by Swift Farms to visit organic farming communities organized by Swift in 2000. Swift Farms received a land grant near the Cambodian border to produce organic asparagus for export. (Figure 3.4) Swift trained its first 47 farmers in 2000 on 94 rai. (Figure 3.5) In 2001, the operation was certified by OMIC (Overseas Merchandise Inspection Co., Ltd.) for JAS standards. Currently Swift Farms is also certified by BCS oko-Garantie for EU and JAS. Swift Farms benefited by export sales of organic products. The corporation was able to expand its operations of internationally accepted agricultural production processes to over 1200 rai.

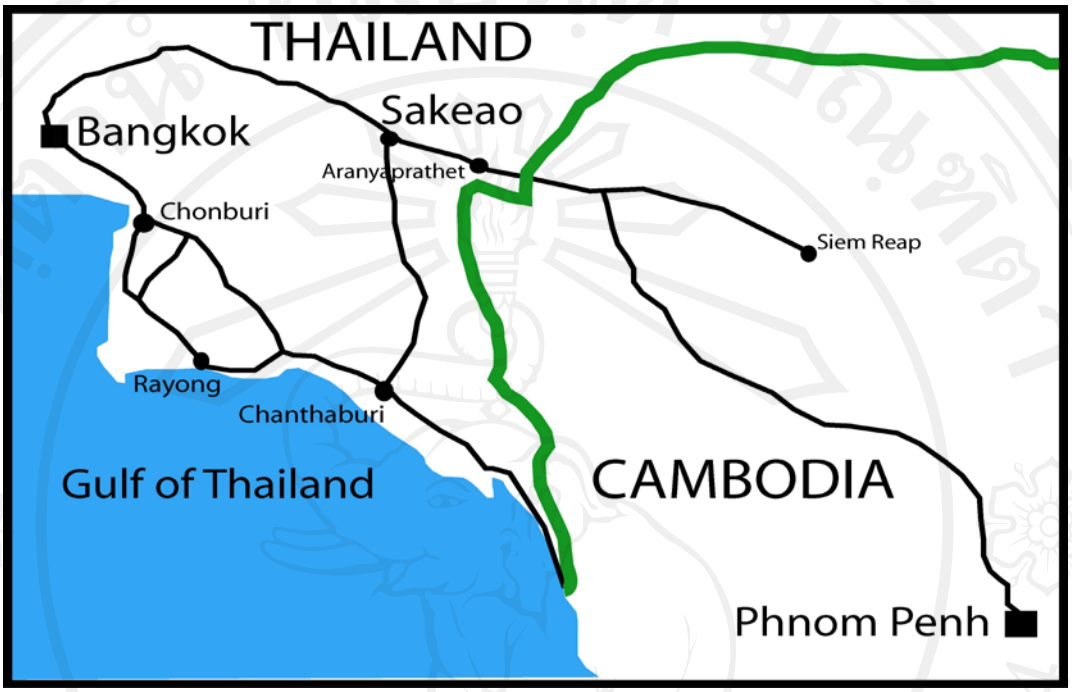


Figure 3.4 Map of Sakeao, Thailand

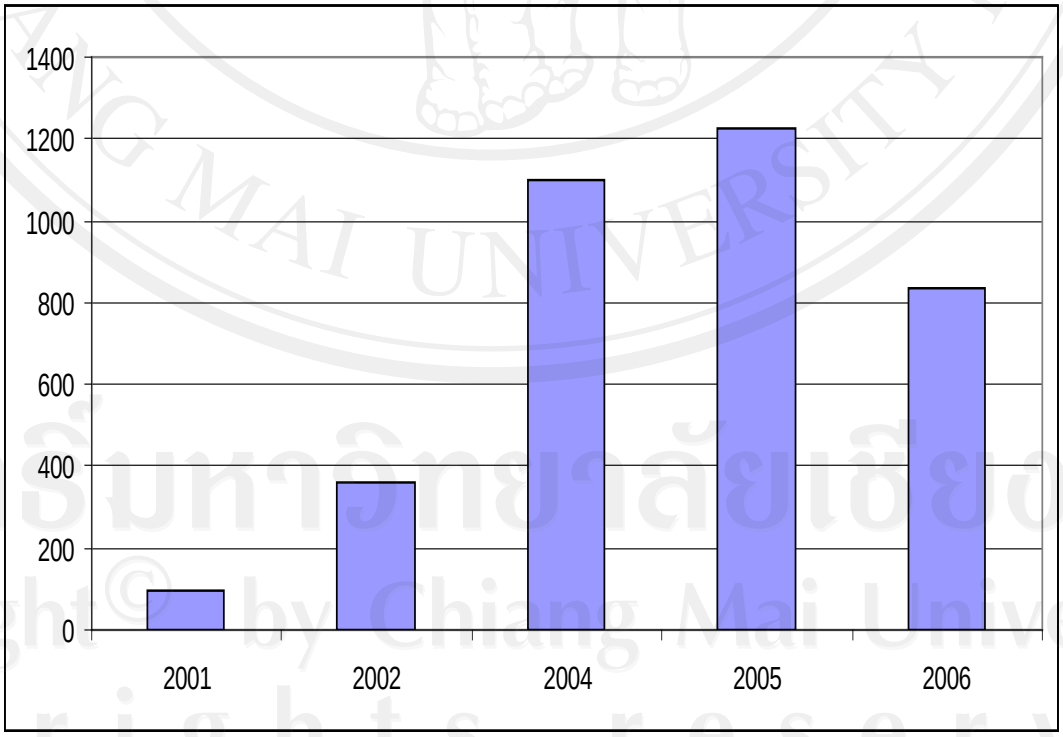


Figure 3.5 Growth of Swift Farms production area in Sakeao in *rai*

The Swift Farms corporate model demonstrates corporate benevolence. As part of the agreement for the government land grant, Swift Farms must grant each farmer two rai of land for production. Farmers who continue to work on the land for four years receive ownership and title to the land. Swift Farms receives many prospective applicants to produce asparagus. They range from former farmers to carpenters and former urban residents without any farming skills. However, Swift Farms does not accept individual farmers, but instead works with farmer groups. Farmers are organized into groups of five families, with a one family acting as farm leader, on parcels of ten rai. Farm groups accepted into the Swift Farms program receive three years of training. At that time, farm production for the two years was bought at a market rate for uncertified asparagus, the following year the asparagus was bought as "Organic Thailand", and the third year bought at the market price of internationally certified produce.

One requirement of regulations on Swift Farms is that the corporation upholds practices such as fair trade by negotiating farm gate price contract with its member farmers. Farmers know the value of their production before planting begins. On average, the Swift Farmer could make 1000 baht/day for 8 months of harvest season, resulting in an annual income of 240,000 baht from 2 Rai of land. This is significantly higher than the 2003 national average of 38,000 baht per year (National Statistics Office, 2003). Swift Farms asparagus production in Sakeow is highly profitable. Swift Farms is able to produce asparagus for 60% lower production costs at its certified organic operation in Sakeao compared to the cost of production at its conventional operation in Nakorn Pathon. (Table 3.1)

Table 3.1 Swift Farms maintenance costs per rai (conventional and organic)

	Synthetic fertilelizer	Organic fertilelizer	Substrate	Agro-chemical	Approved organic bio-	Cost to Harvest	Total
Conventional in Nakorn-pathon	1,424	920	16,032	2179	0	6,126	24,504
Organic in Sakeao	0	1,900	240	0	356	2,496	9,984

Disaster struck when severe flooding in 2006 deluged 30% of Swifts Farms' production area. Because of the cost of recovering the land, the corporation made a decision not to put the land back into production and reduced its member farmers by nearly 30% (Table 3.2) (Swift, 2004). The disaster demonstrates the power of the underlying need for corporate profits within the corporate approach. The Swift Farm community in Sakeao is wholly dependant on the company. Nearly a third of the farmers who agreed to the Swift Farms partnership lost their livelihoods through a profit maximizing decision. The Swift Farms farmer groups do not represent a community. In fact, it was reported to me by the Swift Farms organizer that most of the farmers live away from the farm sites in nearby villages. The farmers commute to their farms. Unlike an organized village community, when crisis strikes, the farmers are incapable of taking care of itself. Without self-reliance or self-sufficiency, communities simply disappear.

Table 3.2 Swift Farms members 2001-2006

Year	Members
2001	47
2002	171
2004	493
2005	590
2006	414

In 2007 the Swift Farms community leader applied to the government for a three million baht grant to place 52 families on 136 rai. The grant focused on local income residents of Northeastern Thailand. The farmers are told that they may purchase their land after they raise enough money, but that sun was not disclosed during any interviews. I interviewed one of the new farmers, a former construction worker, married, with a four year old son. Though he had never farmed before, he joined the project with high expectations. He was being trained in organic farming techniques at the community college in Sakaeo while working part time in construction. It can not be argued that this individual demonstrates flexibility. He is not part of an established community, he does not own his own land, and his intention is to become a farmer for a corporation. Working under these conditions represents an occupation, not a lifestyle.

As with many other parts of the world where farmers produce under corporate contracts, the farmers of Swift Farms are more like employees than independent farmers. This is not a criticism of Swift Farms, Inc., as they have brought income and prospects for new lives to many people in the Northeast. I am simply pointing out that this model does not demonstrate sustainability or community culture. The power is held by the corporation, the way of life and agricultural production processes are imposed on the landscape as an invented or perhaps borrowed discourse and controlled by neoliberal, international markets. Sakeow is a

exotic space where neoliberalism looks very much like local control and community life. It is disguised as social justice and environmentally friendly organic production. But one look at the well demarcated, rectangular plots, the neatly placed registration markers for process control, and the sadly misfortunate farmers who found themselves in a flood zone reveals that there is no local power or control, but a benevolent, yet rational arbiter of global corporate management.

Though I was unable to interview anyone from River Kwai International Food Company directly, my experiences with the Mae Tha farm group and information freely available form the internet allows a brief commentary on River Kwai's corporate role in the Northern Thai communities. River Kwai is a leader in Thailand for the export of sweet corn. In 2003, sales totaled 1,082 million baht, of which 58% were in Sweet Corn export, 28% were in organic vegetable, 7% in domestic sales and another 7% in the sale of sweet corn seed (River Kwai Foods, 2003). The United Kingdom, Korea, Spain, Germany, Taiwan, Japan, Holland, Russia, the US, and Lebanon were major importers, with another 25% of company sales going to other locations worldwide. River Kwai owns 600 rai of organic farmland in Thailand and contracts additional independent farmers in Kanchanaburi, Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. In 2008 the company expanded into Laos, increasing its organic production by 8 rai. River Kwai organic products are certified by the Soil Associating of the UK and JAS of Japan (Bangkok Post, 2008).

River Kwai does not bring Thai farmers together; it is a corporation facilitating a market for existing farmers and hire laborers for their own farm operations. River Kwai is responsible for purchasing much of the organic baby corn from the Mae Tha farm group. However, unlike Swift Farms, it did not control the land or introduce organic farming in Mae Tha. Organized as *"Sa ha korn gan kaset yang yun Mae Tha"* over 20 years ago, the Mae Tha farmer alliance has grown to 331 families, of which 117 practice certified organic farming, of which over 60 produce for River Kwai, Inc. Unlike other organic farm groups around Chiang Mai, Mae Tha farmers are trained by Earthnet, certified by ACT and their products are marketed by Greennet in Bangkok and for export. Mae Tha farmers were born and raised in their communities. They own their own land and participate in local government. During my visit, the leader of the Mae Tha farmer group had been elected to also be the

leader of TAO. Literature, available in English, showed that the farm group supported social issues such as sufficiency economy and "global transformation."

Mae Tha is a complex example of how a farm community can interact with neoliberal markets through both a corporation, River Kwai, and through a NGO, Greennet. ACT certification used in Mae Tha by farmers producing baby-corn for export has international equivalency with IFOAM. Certification under international standards reproduces organic networks destined for neoliberal commodity networks. The scale of production required for these networks exceeds the production output of local, small farms. Mae Tha is exemplary in that many small farmers have organized to be able to produce at sufficient scale to enter into neoliberal, export markets. There are two main reasons why Mae Tha farmers could achieve their network. First, they only produce baby corn for export. Though they may produce vegetables for personal consumptions, their farms do not produce vegetables for local markets. Second, they have been organized for over 25 years and are renown as one of Thailand's first organic farm groups. Mae Tha farmers effectively act as one large farm through specialty and community organization. Internationally accepted certification reproduces the Mae Tha farmer's organic network by allowing them access to international markets, thereby establishing a commodity network from producer to consumer through international exporters and commercial retail distributors.

This case is worthy of much more explanation than can be offered by this research as it fell outside of the scope of my field investigations. It was not clear to me how the dependency on corporate distribution influenced village life, or how being organized under a Bangkok based NGO affected local production. However, my limited observations do provide further examples of the corporate relationship with a community, and in the case of Mae Tha, that such relationships tend to demand the large-scale production of one crop, be it baby corn or asparagus, and that such a relationship links a community into the global economy for that one, particular product, subjecting the community to the vagaries of price fluctuations and the conditions of corporate control over quality, quantity, and production schedules.

3.6 The governmental approach

The Thai government organizes farmers through *amphoe* agricultural offices and through the Royal Project Foundation. RPF works exclusively with highland farmers specifically to encourage the eradication of opium production though cash crop replacement strategies. As of this writing, Royal Project Foundation has been supporting highland farmers for 38 years. RPF officials explained that top opium producing villages are the highest priority. Some highland villages may request to join RPF while some villages were directly invited to be part of the project by the king. Villages are ethnically diverse and include Akha, Hmong, Chin Mo, Karen, and Lahu. RPF decides what will be grown and provides training, seeds, collection, distribution, and marketing. Participating villages are given an exclusive agreement with RPF to be the sole distributor of their produce. The price paid to farmers is the current farm-gate price. There are other benefits for working with RPF, such as improved roads are built and electricity is brought to participating villages. RPF has the operational scale to maintain the entire commodity network. RPF's role in bringing farm groups together is as the guarantor of market, without a fixed contract, and as a trainer for new entrants, and an organizer for production.

Clearly, at the time of this investigation RPF had complete control over the process of production and distribution of products. RPF's ability to control the political and social landscape came in large part to the moral authority granted to it through royal patronage and the extension of the King's Thai symbolic power, *barami*, into the RPF commodity network. In this example, neither RPF, nor the members of its bureaucracy had *barami*, the power of which was then, as now, retain in whole by the King, as the accumulation of all good deeds in this life, from his role as a *damaraja,* and good deeds from past lives as well. So great is the King's *barami* that it gives RPF unquestioned authority in its activities. Such unprecedented power may have unintentional consequences when given to bureaucrats who have not earned such respect. At his juncture, it became social and economic capital, because it is "known and recognized" (Bourdieu, 1989: 21) by the corporate, neoliberal networks into which it enters. It allowed RPF to control its own distribution centers, marketing centers, and has access to corporate supermarkets throughout Thailand where products are sold under the "Doi Kham" label.

RPF also exerted certain social controls through coordination with government development officers. RPF reported that through its efforts there is greater literacy, access to health care, and income and self-sufficiency in participating communities as it focuses on specific cash crops suitable for highland farmers, (Royal Project Foundation, 2009) placing an emphasis on economic return. Here we see that the power exerted by RPF was used for mixed objectives of both profit maximization and social development. Power and control are clearly in the hands of RPF. There was no guaranteed price, as with Swift Farms, only a guaranteed market, farm gate price will fluctuate with market demand. RPF is a comparatively large institution tasked to eradicate opium and social highland ethnic groups into Thai culture and Thailand's national goals. There was no debate about discourse coalitions or the integration of social objects. Discourse and regulation were unidirectional, and those not willing to participate in the RPF network do so at their own their own risk. This example demonstrates that the government approach is often laden with many other social objects, not the least being political domination and control

At a much smaller scale, some certified farmer leaders are sponsored by the *amphoe* agricultural office. "JW" of San Kamphaeng is one such farmer who turned certified farming into certain success. "JW" was born in Ban Mae Pha Hen 46 years ago and has lived there ever since. He became a typical farmer using pesticides and fertilizers to grow crops for sale. But as he grew older he noticed that "many old people get sick." He attributed this to the use of pesticides and decided in 2005 to change his agricultural production practices to GAP regulations. Under a district tsponsered GAP promotion program, "JW" received 8 rai of land with buildings (a former school) from the government on which to cultivate under GAP regulations. "JW" organized 10 farmers into a register farm group to grow eggplant, pumpkin, kale, spinach, morning glory[16], and Chinese vegetables. He says that he saves money because he does not have to buy pesticides. What's more, he gets a higher price for

[16] The Asian eatable morning glory *Ipomoea aquatica*, also known as water spinach, should not be confused with poisonous and other non-eatable varieties of *Ipomoea.*

his certified vegetables. His group has a fixed contract with a company that supplies the seeds. By working together, the 10 farmers are able to meet the needs of the vegetable contractor. TAO provided the farm group funding to buy equipment to make fertilizer and provided his group with a natural gas processor equipped to fill large pressurized cooking gas tanks. The group then went into contract pig production, using the manure to make gas and compost for their farm.

This example demonstrates how a relatively small incentive provided by local government can result in a large gain for the community. Unutilized land was given, at a very low cost (5000 baht/year), to a local community leader to organize safe agricultural production. The vested power of the government in the land was relinquished by the rental agreement. Farmers willingly accept the oversight and regulations provided by GAP and MOAC certifiers. Power is shared, with each actor receiving a benefit acceptable by all. A very similar situation exists in Doi Saket. As with the site in San Kamphaeng, an old school site of 15 rai was leased for 1500 baht/year to 21 farmers at *Ban Po Tung Ja Rung*. This site also acts as a demonstration site for GAP for visiting domestic and international researchers. The government supplied materials for the production of wood vinegar and herbal insect repellent, which is also available for sale by the group to local farmers. The Doi Saket group also works with MCC and may sell their products at the MCC community market. Again, the goals of the government, to promote GAP farming, and the farm group, to practice GAP farming to receive farm income, are in agreement. There is no sign of social domination, no dependency on the government for marketing or distribution. The project demonstrates community involvement and the principles of Northern Thai village community life where local farmers work together to meet individual needs and the needs of the group. This small scale example of government coordination in creating a farm group is strongly contrasted by a similar project funded by GAP in Saraphi.

The farmers at Saraphi presented a conundrum. The district office provided a list of 173 farmers who were either certified or were in the process of certifying under GAP. However, field sampling of 57 farms revealed that only 17 farms were producing any agricultural products. Of these, two were growing longan and another 2 were producing for personal consumption only. Those farms growing vegetable

crops are listed in Table 3.3. A map of Saraphi associating farms with GPS locations is provided at Figure 3.6. One hydroponic farm had already been certified for three years and was marketing directly to Rimping Supermarket in Chiang Mai, as well as to various hotels and restaurants. The most developed farm site is a demonstration farm operated by husband and wife age 52 and 38 respectively. The couple operates on less than 2 rai of land provided by the government. They grow a wide variety of introduced, Chinese, and local vegetables[17], as well as fish sold outside the Saraphi government building. They had only been certified for 8 months. Additional benefits from being a demonstration site include receiving assistance from students and farmers in training. Before the introduction of GAP incentives, many farmers in Saraphi were selling chili and garlic. Saraphi has traditionally been a chili and garlic producing region. It was not made clear during the interviews if the chili and garlic were being sold as GAP certified or not. With the exception of the demonstration farmers, the other farmers in the project did not give many details about their lives. All of the other farmers interviewed stated that they were in the process of organizing a farm and were not, at that time, producing farm products.

[17] Introduced vegetables refer to crops brought to Thailand from North America and Europe, such as broccoli, cauliflower, red radishes, beets and tomatoes. Introduced vegetables are specifically not native Thai species or those historically grown in Thailand. Chinese vegetables are separated from introduced vegetables because they are part of the traditional foods eaten by Chinese Thai and include varieties such as pak choi, kale, and Chinese cabbages.

Table 3.3 GAP Certified Farms in Saraphi Producing Vegetables

GPS Location	Size (rai)	Yearly Income (baht)	Product
2	5	168000	Chinese, introduced and local vegetables
12	5	70000	Garlic, Chili, Cauliflower
18	2	50000	Introduced and Chinese Vegetable
21	2	45000	Introduced and Chinese Vegetable
13	2	30000	Garlic
20	2	20000	Chinese Vegetable, Morning Glory
19	1.5	20000	Chili, Chinese Vegetable
4	1	840000	Hydroponic salad
6	1	40000	unspecified
28	1	20000	Chili
8	1	12000	unspecified
25	1	3000	Long Bean and Local Vegetable
22	2	n/a	Celery
29	1	0	Eggplant, local vegetable
30	1	0	unspecified

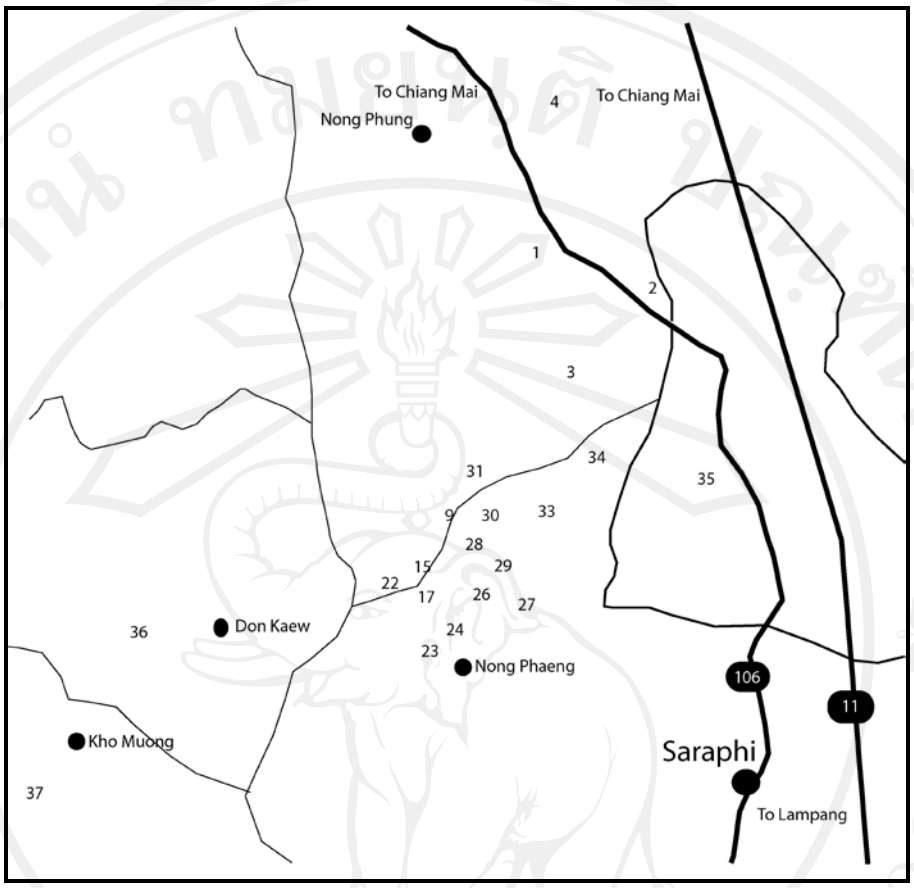


Figure 3.6 Map of Certified Vegetable Farms in Amphoe Saraphi

In my opinion, based on my review of the literature, conversations with Thai colleagues and farm leaders, the most of the people signed up for the GAP program in Saraphi did so for reasons of *krengchai* and patronage. Understanding the situatedness of *krengchai* allowed me to understand why so many community members had enrolled in the district GAP program without ever having an intention of farming. Farmers and other community members felt an obligation to participate at the request of the leading government official. For some, enrolling in the district GAP program had little meaning at all except that it by doing so did not disturb the community order, they did not make a problem for the leader and there were no negative consequences. For others, and in particular practicing farmers, there was an expectation of receiving a benefit from participation.

The particular district agricultural leader was highly charismatic, already having demonstrated success by organizing farmers in nearby *Amphoe* San Pa Tong. He was able to provide many benefits to actual farmers of Saraphi, including training

and various agricultural products, such as organic pest repellents and traps, as well as fertilizers. Those farmers who had already been producing and marketing their vegetables had only to gain by participating in the program. These farmers already had established commodity networks and markets. Some farmers were able to take advantage of the marketing opportunities provided by MCC and the Saturday community market established outside of the Saraphi district office.

The activities of the local district offices support the political structure of Thailand's regional government and reinforce Bangkok's control of Thai provincial space. The provincial governors and *amphoe* officers are all appointed by the ministry of the interior whose office is controlled by the national prime minister. The *amphoe* officer is Bangkok's direct link to at least 86 percent of the Thai Population. However, balancing Bangkok's hegemony is the relationship between the governor and local community politicians. Political action occurs as a complex set of negotiations and patronage continuously negotiated and renegotiated with every new appointee (Chai-Anan Samudavanija, 1987: 77; Neher, 1974: 5-9, 35). Consequently many programs are done more out of necessity than desire; local advocacy of a policy is more of a responsibility than a commitment to an ideal. The district officer is not dependent on making a profit or assuring long-term successful, responsibility ends after meeting a set of objectives and filing a report. The problem with the GAP initiative in Saraphi is that it is limited by the ability to expand the market. Unlike the farmers in Doi Saket or San Kamphaeng, the farmers of Saraphi did not organize themselves into a group and approach the government for assistance. Instead, the government approached the farmers with a goal of imposing a new production process on the community. Power was moving from top-down, and farmers initially participate to receive in-kind assistance, because of *krengchai* for the local leaders, or both. Only the demonstration farms and farmers already established in larger markets were producing vegetables.

3.7 The NGO approach

NGOs, such as ISAC, provide services to farm groups throughout the Chiang Mai area. (Figure 3.7) NGOs have been, by far, the leading proponents of safe agriculture. However, NGOs in Thailand, as well as organizations of civil

society seeking official approval (hereafter referred to as associations) must be register and approved by the Ministry of the Interior. As such, they face the challenge of scrutiny by the constantly changing democratic government. The government is placed in a contradictory role of wanting to create spaces of democracy while also wanting to maintain political control. Associations of civil society and the NGOs supporting them have been described as "state led" or "elite" associations of civil society (Simkins, 2003: 276). They become "a partnership between the state, the private sector, and popular sector" The goal of the partnership is to reduce conflicts while sponsoring the overall state agenda (Simkins, 2003: 276; Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2006: 6-10). These relationships lead to negotiations of local objectives with the discourse of Bangkok, creating hybrid implementations of safe agricultural practice.

Patronage is extended into the domain of NGOs by way of the relative degree of collaboration or autonomy. The resulting policies of the NGOs can be seen as working directly toward the aims of the Bangkok government or more directly focused on the local needs of the communities to which they serve. The nature of patron-client relationships, also known as the *Sakdina*[18] system in Thailand, is well known in the literature (Akin Rabibhadana, 1975; Hanks, 1975; Hart, 1989; Jumbala Prudhisan, 1987; Snit Smarkarn, 1998; Turton, 1989). The patron-client relationship is a vital part of Thai social order. The relationship of the Thai client is usually defined in terms of "moral obligation, reciprocity, dependency, gratitude… [and] gives shape to their perception of power, social groups and political organizations (Bechstedt, 2002:253). The relationships are hierarchical and largely "symbolic" in that they are based on mutual gain and trust, lasting as long as each member derives benefit and maintains social ranking. A client maintains a relationship with a patron to pursue personal interests. Patronage is part of the larger "*bun khun*" [19]

[18] The *sakdina* system was institutionalized by King RAMA I as a system of social hierarchy. In modern times it remains as a part of interpersonal Thai relationships.

[19] *Bun Khun* can be interpreted as a "debt of gratitude" (Snit Smarkarn, 1998: 140) and a moral, obligatory social tie holding relationships together (Chai Phodista, 1985: 45). "The *bun khun* system of obligations and the network that develops from it are based on the provision of benefits and favors of any kind from one party to another and the needs and capacities of the persons in contact" (Snit Smarkarn, 1998: 139).

relationships which extend from the immediate family to the monarchy, binding all of Thai society together into reciprocal and unequal power relations. The stability of the social order is dependent on the ability of patrons to maintain their power while, at the same time, providing benefits for their clients. This requires ever increasing networks of relationships and commitments, creating a complex fabric of connectivity in Thai society (Girling, 1981: 40-43). Patronage extends into Thai state ministries who see themselves as both "protector" of state resources and "providers" of access (Jamaree Chiengtong, 2001: 11). The problem of patronage is that it is inherently exclusionary and thereby does not serve the needs of the population as a whole, particularly when extended into the realm of the government. "When government decisions are made on the basis of patronage, benefits are shared among a small group of people, often accompanied by corruption and disregard for the general welfare of the people" (Saichan Kosum, 2006: 10).

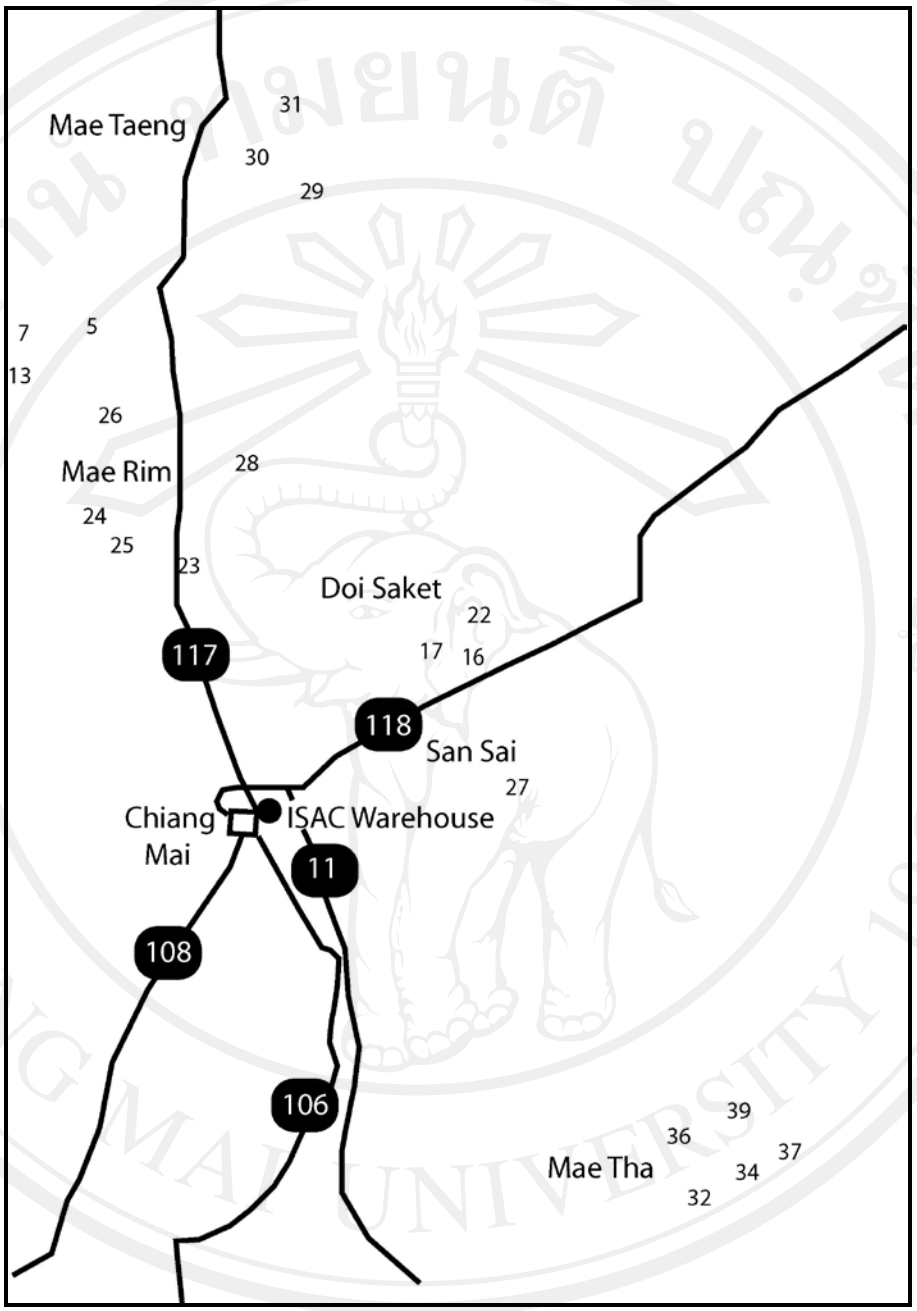


Figure 3.7 ISAC Farmers around Chiang Mai

This situation is further exacerbated by the economic primacy of Bangkok and its political and economic domination over all regions of Thailand. Bangkok's bureaucratic behemoth has been described as "a kind of path dependence, in which previous levels of political and economic dominance attained by Bangkok generate yet greater dominance by attracting more investment, migration and political attention to the capital." This dominance is reinforced by the activities of state institutions

(Glassman, 2004: 199). Neoliberal objectives, such as free trade and increased industrialization, are generally in conflict with the overall goals of community culture. It may be safe to state that the expansive, extractive, and consumptive nature of global capitalism is in direct conflict with the space of community culture where NGOs and other actors pursue goals of self-reliance and Buddhist ideals. Assertions of power by Bangkok's bureaucracy over Northern Thai safe agricultural actors is an example of the unequal power relations existing in the regulatory discourse of safe agricultural production processes.

ISAC was established through community initiative, and particularly with the support of the community based, Northnet foundation. ISAC is a institution based on a commitment to community building, self-reliance, and sustainability. The community outreach program of ISAC is organized by the founding director and then implemented by Khun Pak Good, the produce warehouse manager and community trainer. For the purposes of this analysis I will focus on Khun Pak Good. She is a local person, born in Mae Taeng and graduated from Ratchaphat University with a degree in civil service. For almost 12 years now she has worked for ISAC because she enjoys helping farmers and promoting *Lanna* culture. That is to say that she enjoys living and participating in the village lifestyle. Her job entails going out to the many villages scattered through the north where ISAC has operations. According to Khun Pak Good, her job is to "help the farmer stand on his own feet and become self-reliant." She provides training in organic farm techniques, NOSA regulations, personal health and community welfare. Khun Pak Good also advocates various ISAC policies, many of which have their roots in OXFAM ideology. OXFAM is the primary supported of ISAC, providing funding for price guarantees, as well as many operating costs. OXFAM specifically asks ISAC to work with small farm groups and support issues such as biodiversity and fair trade.

From one viewpoint it can be said that ISAC is an advocate of global fair trade policy and other "Western" issues supported by OXFAM. On the other hand, the issue related to OXFAM, such as those listed and others, including women's welfare and sustainable development, are all within the scope of ISAC's original organizational documents. It is a power relationship not unlike that of RPF and the Thai national government, where RPF promotes Thai nationalism and other state

ideals as stated in its organizational objectives while receiving support from the state. There is a harmony between the actor providing funding and the actor-institution implementing various caveats of that funding. However, at the next network level, between the institution and the farm group, there is a significant difference between the relationship between ISAC and the farm group and RPF and the Highland village. ISAC specifically supports community empowerment and self-sufficiency. To be successful, ISAC must help farm groups to become self-sufficient, forming sustainable agricultural communities.

The Northnet statement below explains ISAC's operating values. The board clearly recognizes the dangers of neoliberal influence n the local community. The reliance on "outside" influences is given primary importance as a cause of the destructive influences to the local community.

> "The new agricultural system is modeled on a single approach to farming. While chemical farming has produced good results in many respects such as increasing food for consumption, it requires the following steps: (1) inputs external to the farm and community, such as new plant varieties, chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides; (2) the use of modern technology; (3) reliance on outside knowledge and information rather than local wisdom; (4) dependence on export-oriented markets. These changes have caused many problems, such as farmer indebtedness due to high costs of production and health deterioration caused by the use of pesticides and the consumption of pesticide-contaminated food by producers. As well, consumers have lost food security, the culture of production and consumption has changed, the environment has been damaged, biodiversity has been lost, self reliance has been reduced, producers and consumers take advantage of each other, and social problems have also arisen as a result.
>
> The Northnet Foundation believes that Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Marketing are options for addressing these problems. These types of agriculture and marketing should be implemented as and be Community, taking the form of a Sustainable Agriculture Community, where producers and consumers have a good relationship with each other, exchange knowledge and help each other to achieve mutual goals. These goals are to be happy and at peace, to have good physical and mental health, to have food security and a secure economy, society, politics and environment. Taken together, these result in maximum self-reliance."

ISAC farmers are generally older couples between the ages of 40 to 65. (Table 3.4) They grow many different kinds of vegetables and raise animals for local consumption on farms ranging from less than 1 rai but not more than 10 rai. They make their own fertilizers and organic pest repellants. For the most part, their farms are small and their children, while living either on the same property or in the same village, have outside work. All ISAC farmers stated that at this time in their lives they are happy to be farmers and to be part of the village life. Similar to Swift Farms, only farmer groups of ten or more participants may ask to join ISAC. The farm group must have a commitment not only to pesticide free farming, but also to other primary ideals, such as biodiversity and the development of social wellbeing in the village community. ISAC finds its members through word of mouth, community outreach presentations on health related topics, such as the effects of pesticides on the fetus of a pregnant woman, and at public demonstrations where ISAC members are participants.

Table 3.4 Typical ISAC farmers

Farmer	Age	Rai	Vegetables	Animals	Organic
"UU" at Doi Saket	65	2	Chili, cucumber, eggplant	Pigs, ducks, chicken, fish	Samoon pai, compost
"YD" at Mae Taeng	53	3	Cabbage, eggplant, banana, rice, lettuce	Cows and Chickens	
"WN" at San Sai	42	1.2	Cucumbers, buak liam	Chickens, fish, pigs	Samoon pai
"PTN" at Mae Tha	46	3.5	Lettuce, eggplant, local vegetable,	Chicken, cow, pig, fish, frog	
"RTP" at San Sai	50	8	Morning glory, longbean, corn, pak tong, cabbage, kale, corn	Cows	Compost, samoon pai, niim
"S" at San Sai	44	4	Luffa, pumpkin, chives, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, pak ka, long bean	Chickens, cows	Compost

Returning back to the story of "Pak Boong", a farmer mentioned in the first chapter, demonstrates how farmers typically become involved with ISAC. Pak Boong learned about ISAC and pesticide free farming at a rally protesting failed government

price supports. He already had concern and commitment about his belief in unfair agricultural practices, demonstrated by his initiative to go to a rally and the time he spent speaking with an ISAC representative about alternative farming. Interviews with ISAC farmers suggest that they are concerned for their communities. Most ISAC farmers attend *tambon* and *amphoe* agricultural meetings, as well as OTOP[20] meeting when available. One ISAC farmer in Ban Don Tiang, age 50, stated that he participates in agricultural extension trainings, the latest being in the use of fertilizers. He said that he likes to go to the meetings to "know what other people are thinking." Another resident of the same community also said she went to *tambon* meetings, but was very disappointed with OTOP's ability to help her sell organic rice. Some ISAC members go to government meetings to avoid fines, such as the 100 baht fine imposed by the local headman. In that instance, the headman was voted out of office after his term. Other villagers go to *amphoe* meeting to receive items such as seeds and agricultural equipment. Sometimes ISAC farmers can not benefit from these government giveaways because they are opposed to the objectives of ISAC, such as nets to prevent birds from eating rice, which also kill the birds caught in them and hence decreasing biodiversity.

ISAC is placed in a constantly negotiated, contingent position with its farmers. Power is shared between farmers, the government, and the institution. ISAC is limited in its ability to dominate; its methods of cajolement are generally positively based, except in extreme instances when farmers are asked to leave. For example, Khun Pak Good must often act as a problem solver and often is called on to settle disputes over land use, production quotas, and even marketing. While interviewing a farm group in Mae Taeng Khun Pak Good learned of a farmer who did not save his soybean crop for sale to the ISAC collective. The farmer had been offered a higher price for "organic" soybeans. The other members were concerned that they could not meet their quota. (ISAC offers a price guarantee on soybeans, selling the soybeans to an international distributor who requires a minimum quantity for contract fulfillment.) The farmers asked for Khun Pak Good's help as a mediator. She met with the farmer and explained the situation, stating that in the future ISAC may not want his soybeans

[20] OTOP refers to the One Tambon, One Product initiative put forward by the Thai Rak Thai party from 2001 to 2006.

anymore. ISAC made its quota, but not without using heavy handed tactics to keep the farmers from breaking their agreements. When I asked Khun Pak Good about this incident she explained that this was a problem of participating in external (neoliberal) markets. ISAC prefers to encourage its farmers to produce for local consumption and avoid national and global markets. However, ISAC is called on by NGO support to develop export markets, so such problems can occur. Fortunately for ISAC, NGOs like OXFAM are willing to cover any losses incurred in the global sector. Power is played out by actors on all sides, negative consequences of mishandled power relationships are generally smoothed out by generous hearts living abroad.

I included the multiple Cropping Center of Chiang Mai University under the NGO approach because it acts more like an NGO than a government organization. In fact, MCC operates in many different capacities, serving pesticide-free and pesticide reduced farmers through the Chiang Mai area. The Multiple Cropping Center (MCC) was established in 1969 as a joint project between the Ford Foundation and the Thai government to increase rice production in Chiang Mai. MCC has branded its own logo to identify crops grown using "Integrated Pest Management" (IPM) and other pesticide reduced/free techniques. The MCC logo represents uncertified vegetables grown with the assurance of farmers' adherence to a standard of safety and health set by MCC. MCC locally certifies its farmers though the reputation, respect and trust that the community has in MCC and its research staff.

The goal of MCC's program is to develop sustainable agriculture and sustainable livelihoods throughout *changwat* Chiang Mai. (Figure 3.8) MCC trains farmers within the existing social structures. MCC coordinates with RPF, *amphoe* and *tambon* offices, and farmers linked with its research partners. Although MCC is a research institution, its mission is not just about agricultural production processes; it's about maintaining relationships and building community. MCC's mission is far less restrictive than ISAC. Issues such as biodiversity are weighed in against Integrated Pest Management farming techniques. Farmers are trained to use a wide variety of pest-reducing methods, such as nets, glue and water traps, "bio-extracts", and herbal pest repellents and pesticides. MCC works much more closely with the government than ISAC and recruits directly from government meetings. Every *amphoe* sponsored

project I visited, such as the ones in Doi Saket, San Kamphaeng, and Saraphi, received training and guidance from MCC.

The MCC field director explained that MCC wants to expand the role of the farmer in the community. They encourage farmer to be involved with *Au-Ba-Taw*. In some ways this goal is self-selecting insofar as MCC recruits farmers through meetings between Agriculture extension and farmers. (Table 3.5) Continued farmer participation strengthens the position of programs like GAP by demonstrating the need for continued funding. On average, MCC and ISAC farmers are very similar, and both organizations keep an eye on their farm groups so they do not cross over to the other agency. MCC also promotes farmer participation in the community through direct marketing at the MCC community market located adjacent the MCC field house and experimental farm. According to a senior researcher, MCC policy insists on maintaining a one on one relationship between farmer and consumer. He estimated that the small farmer produces up to 35% of the needs of the local community.

Table 3.5 Results of farmer interviews conducted in Chiang Mai

Category	**ISAC**	**MCC**	**Total**
Farm Size (rai)	4.5	2.4	3.6
Tenure (yrs)	37.3	35.2	36.3
Age (yrs)	51.1	53.4	52.3
Household members (average)	3.9	4.5	4.2
Certified (years)	6.9	3.8	5.5
Annual Vegetable Income (1000 baht)	49.3	44	46.7
Help from TAO (a*mphoe*)	50%	71%	62%

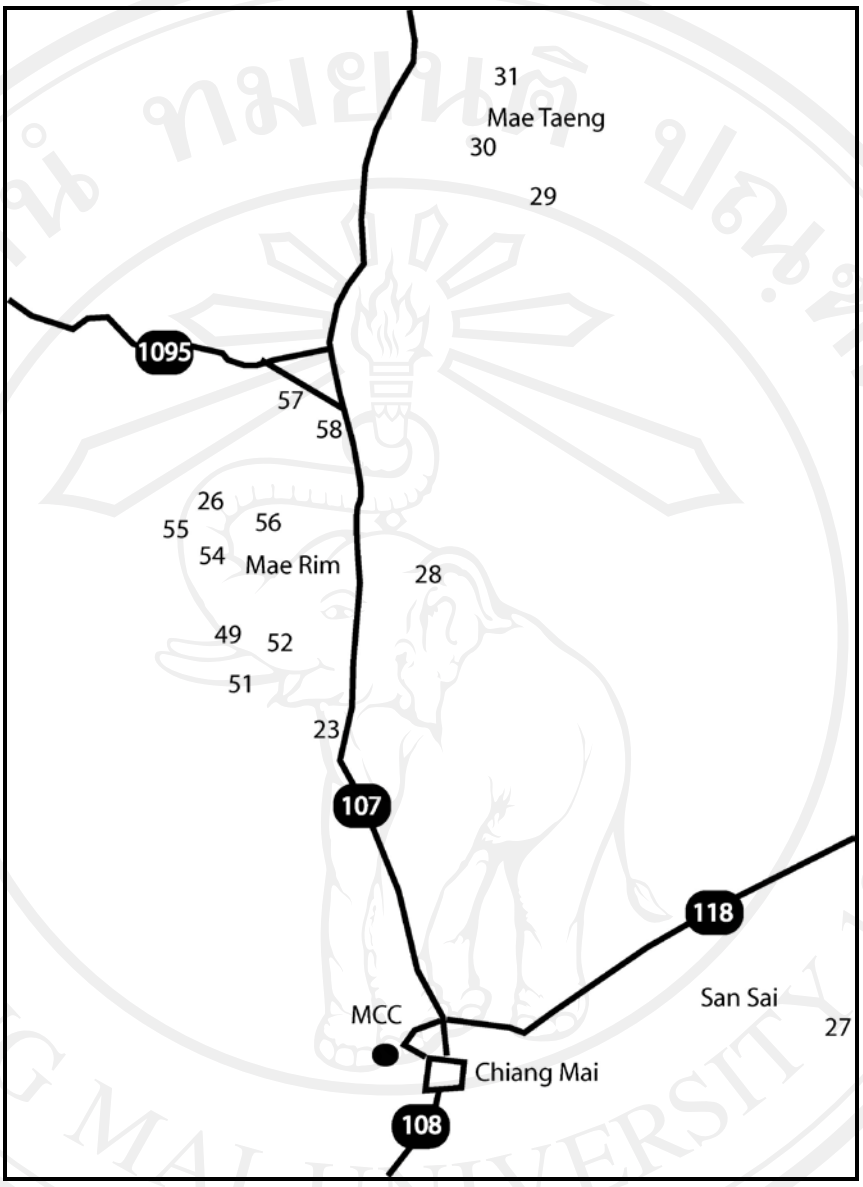


Figure 3.8 Map of MCC Field house and farmers

At the local level, MCC farmers work together and participate in community culture as do those belonging to ISAC. While on field investigation in Mae Rim I observed one group MCC farmers working together to construct a storage building built with funds received from TAO. In another village, MCC farmers met to make and distribute shampoo[21] and washing soap. (Figure 3.9) Their farm leader had

[21] The leader obtained salt, citrus, honey, and rainwater locally. The recipe called for water soaked in lynchee wood coal, also made locally. Only olive oil had to be bought from outside the community.

collected money for the ingredients, organized the production, and supervised distribution. The farmer's were pleased with the quality of the product they made. Distribution was also a good reason for everyone to get together, eat, share stories, and make plans. In both Doi Saket and Mae Taeng I observed MCC farmers producing wood vinegar, used to prevent mold, fungus, and ward off certain insects, from the wood from longan trees. The product was distributed to all farmers in the group.

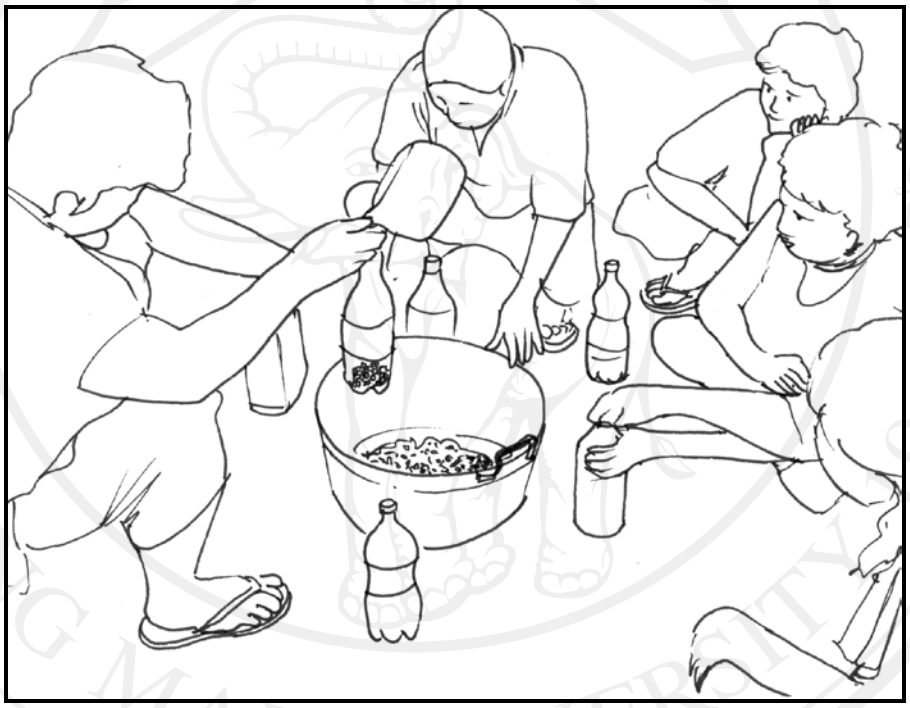


Figure 3.9 Natural soap production

The ideals of community culture are often seen as a form of local resistance to authority by the government ministries while the objectives of government are seen as counter to those of community culture by its practitioners. Referring back to Table 3.5, the farmers of ISAC and MCC do not garner a great deal of support from government agencies. When specifically asked whether they receive help from the *phu yaiban* (the village headman), the TAO, or the PAO, most farmers said no. Those who did take advantage of government programs generally benefited from free giveaways of nets and "bio" products used in making fertilizers or natural insect repellants. This was most often the case for MCC farmers. ISAC farmers were

specifically told not to take nets or “bio” products because they are detrimental to supporting bio-diversity. ISAC farmers who went to government meetings stated they attend TAO events to keep informed about their community. Farmers were aware of the detrimental effects that new business and industry can have on their growing fields. The new projects promoted by the *phu yaiban* were generally not liked by farmers of either organization. Most farmers belonging to MCC or ISAC identify the *phu yaiban* as someone interested in helping those in positions of power, in the promotion of new business, the construction of new buildings, roads, and housing. These projects have little benefit to the farmer and may create problems such as traffic congestion, interruption of water resources, and other limits to agricultural production. The governmental hierarchy of leadership leads from the *phu yaiban* to the Ministry of the Interior and the Prime Minister. The *phu yaiban* is the local activist for national development policies, positioned in this research as neoliberal values.

During my field observations farmers repeatedly stated that they changed to pesticide free or pesticide reduced practices for reasons of health, environment, and for an overall more salubrious lifestyle. (Table 3.5) These are people with a close, personal connection to their land, with the average farm family living on their land for over 36 years. Nine of the farmers interviewed had lived on the same farm all of their lives, while most of the others moved to the farm after getting married. Only one farm family had lived on their farm for less than 20 years. Of all of the farmers interviewed, none were less than 40 years old. Farm sizes are small, being on average between 2 and 5 rai. These farms are operated by small families living a comfortable life outside the city. Their farms are not limited to vegetable production and may include a wide range of other foods grown interspersed with vegetables. Fish, frogs, chickens, cows, goats, and pigs are some of the most common animals raised for food. There are also several fruit trees and many varieties of local vegetables grown for local consumption. A partial list of local vegetables is provided in Appendix B. Many farmers also reported renting up to 10 rai of land for rice production. Most certified farmers will plant pesticide-free rice and derive even more food products, such as crabs, fish, insects, frogs and local vegetables, from the rice field. These products are not available if fertilizers and pesticides are part of the production

process. Typically, farmers will sell half of the rice to cover rent and harvest costs, keeping the rest for consumption.

The farmers of ISAC and MCC can be considered to be “flexible farmers” (Yos Santosombat, 2008), or more specifically as flexible entrepreneurs. (Figure 3.10) Their cash benefit from farming averages less than 50,000 baht per year. However, most of these farmers have other part-time occupations, such as small home crafts, food preparation, and other value-added small industries. They also derive income selling fruits, livestock, poultry, and prepared foods. The fact is that these farmers lead very complex, flexible lives. In a 2009 report on farmers associated with ISAC, OXFAM researchers reported that farmer income from the sale of all farm commodities at the community markets throughout Chiang Mai ranged from 50,000 baht a year to over 460,000 baht per year.[22]

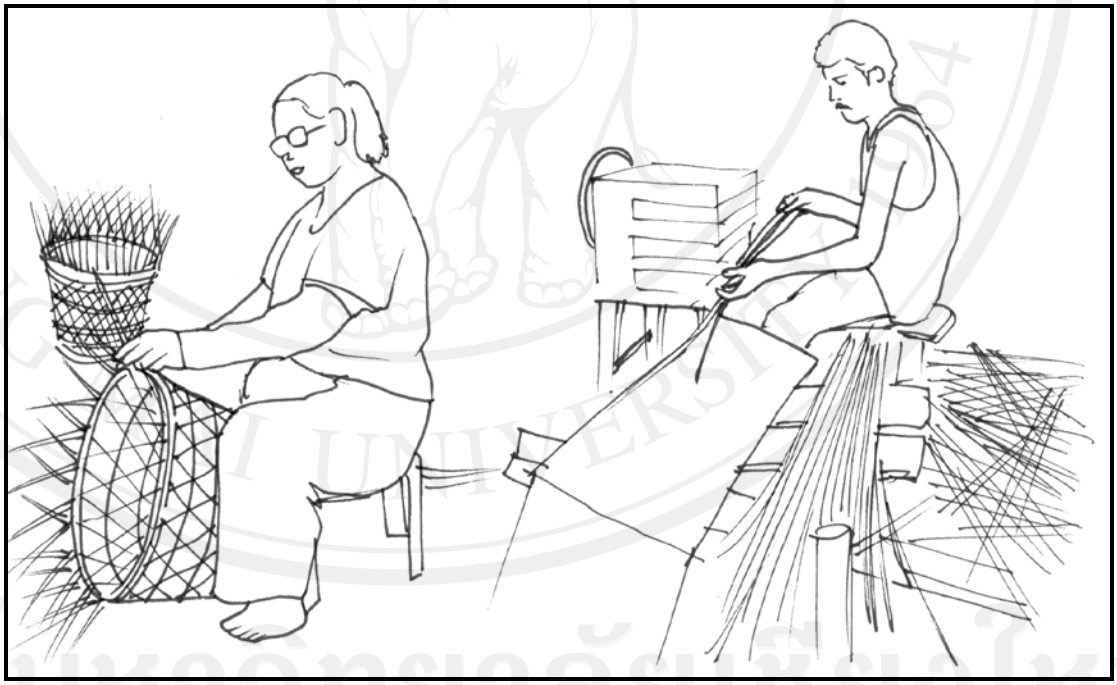


Figure 3.10 ISAC Flexible Farmers, husband and wife, make baskets for secondary income

[22] At the current rate of 35 baht to US dollar, this amounts to about US$1500 to US$13,100 per year in Total farm income.

Total farm income requires the coordinated activities of the entire certified farm group of a village. Family members shared responsibilities for growing, harvesting, preparation and marketing. Village members shared transportation costs and cooperated in selling (OXFAM, 2008). Through certified farm practice these farmers obtained a lifestyle based on sufficiency and community culture. The agricultural practiced observed by the farmer remedied the deleterious effects of chemical and pesticide use on the land allowing for the collection of and propagation of traditional foods. Farmers were able to utilize all of the by-products of their farms for profit and consumption. Certified farm groups work closely together to maintain the integrity of their fields, the overall health and biodiversity of their environments. This is not to say that non-certified groups do not experience community culture, only that the practice of organic and safe agricultural practices increases the opportunity to experience many more aspects of community and cultural life.

An interview with one of the members of an MCC farm group in *Amphoe* San Sai revealed much about their daily life. She and her husband, both 58 years old, rent 3 rai of land for production. They plant eggplant, *pak choi*, kale, leeks, tomatoes, chili, cucumber and long bean and receive 10,000 baht annually for their vegetables. They also raise chickens. The couple makes several herbal pest repellants called *samoon pai*. Examples are tobacco extract, lemon grass extract, and *sadao*, a pest repellant from a tropical tree called Azadirachta indica. (*Sadao* is commonly referred to as *neem*, or *sareum* in *Lanna* language.) They also use natural compost is used fertilizer. (Figures 3.11 and 3.12) Her husband is the village headman. They receive nets, bioextract (a biologically active mix for enhancing fertilizer), and seedlings from a nursery maintained by TAO. Another member of the farm group is 49 years old and farms 3 rai of vegetables and 5 rai of non-organic rice with his wife. They may also grow sweet corn, cauliflower, broccoli, cucumbers, long bean, okra, eggplant, baby corn, pumpkin and potatoes, depending on market conditions and the advice given to them by MCC coordinators. Because they do not use pesticides, the couple may also raise fish and frogs in a pond for home consumption. They earn over 100,000 baht a year on sales of vegetables.

In summary, the power relations between MCC and their farmers are much the same as those experienced by ISAC and its members. Farmer participation is

encouraged by positive incentives, such as training, access to the community markets, and government handouts. The negative incentives experienced by farmers are that MCC is mostly funded through government grants. Member farmers are reliant on the efforts of researchers and their grant money to participate in the programs and have access to the markets. Therein hides the main ideological difference between ISAC and MCC, the former promotes farmers to rely on themselves and their communities while the latter promotes working with the government and government projects, such as GAP. The trail of decision making power up MCC's network ultimately resides with the government and the popular objectives supported by the current administration.

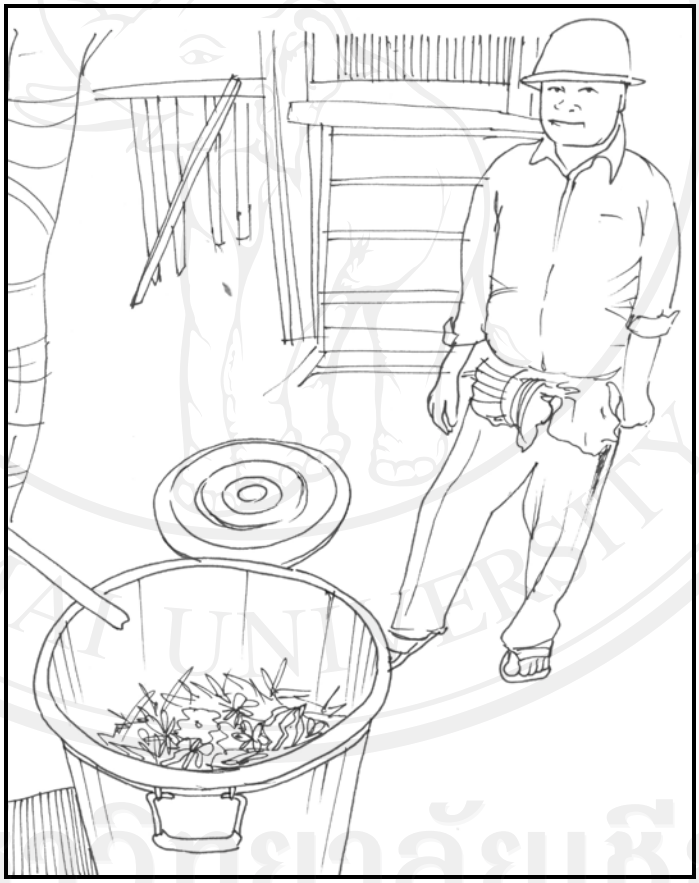


Figure 3.11 Making *samoon pai* in a trash can

Figure 3.12 ISAC farmer making compost

3.8 The private approach

Independent entrepreneurs bring farm groups together. The private sector offers very little opportunity for farmers to participate in the retail market. There were only six private farm groups on record in local *amphoe* offices selling vegetables within the scope of this research in Chiang Mai. (Table 2.1) Many of these farm groups have mixed strategies. For example, farmers in the Kampan Farm group are also associated with MCC. Most private sector farm groups are unstable and farmers often break away to sell their vegetables at fractionally higher prices to other vendors. The assembler, who is often the farm group leader, is responsible for delivery, maintenance, and removal of unsold product. Failure to meet the contract results in stiff penalty fees and eventually the cancellation of contract. The assembler faces dire consequences if only a few farmers choose to sell-out for a higher price.

This dissertation looked in depth at the San Sai farm group (Figure 3.13) because it demonstrated a complete commodity network, from production to sales, in Chiang Mai. It was organized 15 years ago by "Khun Pak Sod." She had been growing certified "Safety Vegetable" from her land in *ban* San Sai Noi, *Amphoe* San Sai, and marketing "Safety Vegetable" from Mae Jo University at her vegetable stall at Thanin market (*Talat Thanin*) in the city of Chiang Mai. She had trained for two

years with professors at Mae Jo University and researchers with RPF who were developing the “Safety Vegetable” standards. After two years and many tests of soil and vegetables in both her land and vegetable shop, Khun Pak Sod was certified as *Pak Plod Pai Jak San Pis* and allowed to use the government logo on her private label. (Figure 1.7)

Professors from Mae Jo University introduced her to three farmers who had been growing experimental plots for student research. One of her farmers, now age 52, had been growing tomatoes and chili and collecting local plant and animals for sale at the fresh markets in San Sai (*Talat San Sai*). He grew sweet corn for the university. His friend and neighbor also grew chili and tomatoes, as well as collected local vegetables and wildlife for sale at the local market and raised sweet corn for the university. They worked together as a team. Another farmer, now age 60, also grew sweet corn for the university. He produced cauliflower and Chinese vegetables for sale at *Talat San Sai*. Khun Pak Sod agreed to buy everything these three farmers produced for sale at her vegetable shop. At the time “Safety Vegetable” certification was awarded to a grower, not to a location. Khun Pak Sod could sell “Safety Vegetable” raised by any farmer willing to follow the “Safety Vegetable” regulations. The government would spot check her market for compliance. She explained that at first the farmers were very insecure about producing “Safety Vegetable”. They were uncertain of her ability to market their crop and they knew that they would not get the same price as she offered at the local market. Over time her farmers realized that they could make more money, have a more stable income and, in Khun Pak Sod’s words, “be happier.”

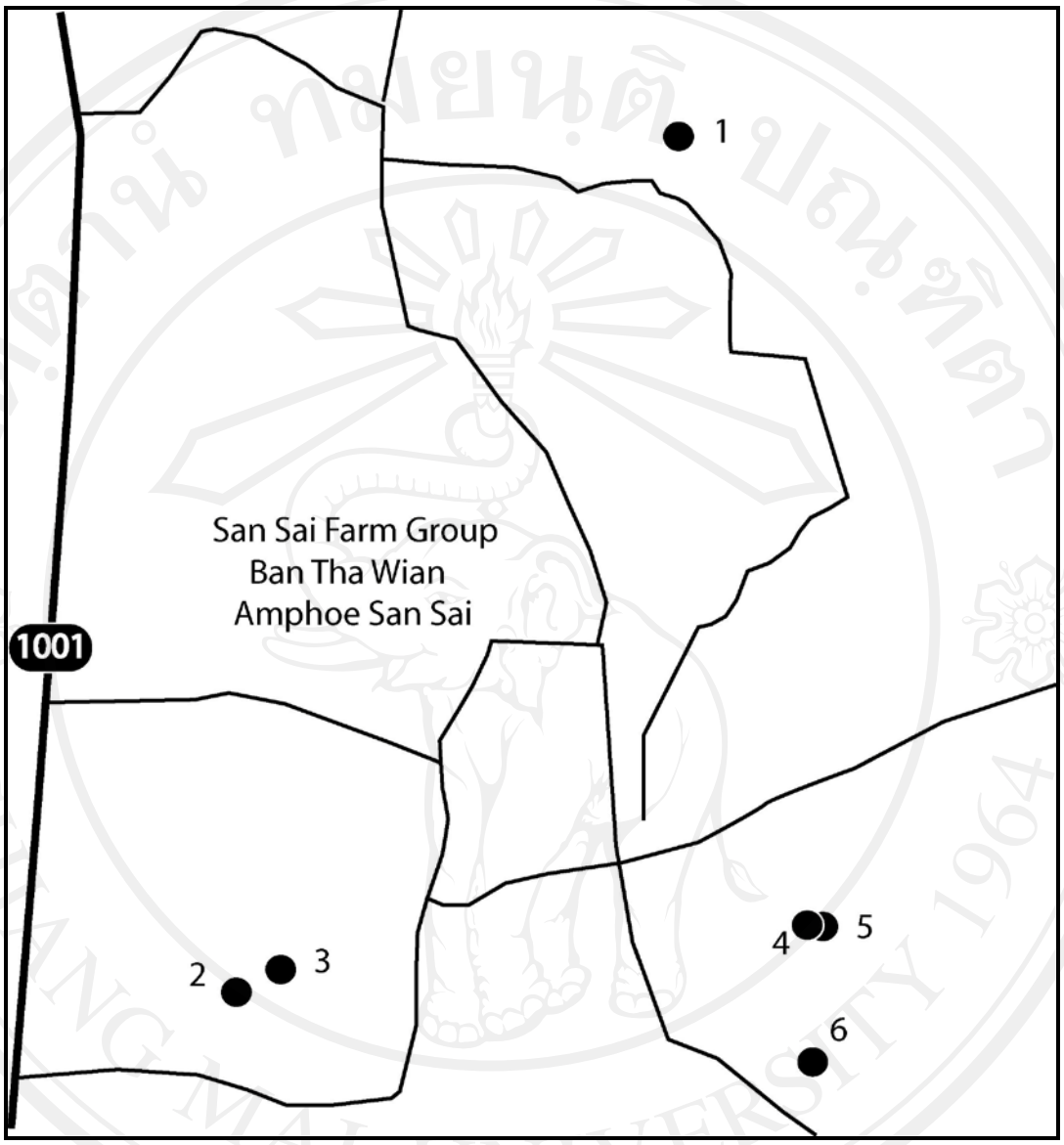


Figure 3.13 Map of San Sai Farm group sites inspected

The San Sai farm group has now grown to 15 farm families. Khun Pak Sod's farmers are contracted directly by her and, like RPF and the farm group in San Kamphaeng, grow what they are told. She supplies the seeds and any other additive or supplement needed to grow. Her farmers are allowed to use pesticides as regulated by GAP. For example, one of her mushroom farmers uses a pesticide called *Centuri* made from bacteria to eradicate insects. Under the rules of GAP, he is also allowed to apply commercial pesticide up to one week before harvesting, but only under the certain conditions of application. The mushroom farmer uses his own 2 rai to grow

mushrooms and rents 2 rai for 2000 baht per year to grow GAP vegetables for Khun Pak Sod. He grows kale, morning glory, Chinese vegetables, and cauliflower certified under both "Safety Vegetable" and GAP. He makes a minimum of 15,000 baht per month selling directly to Khun Pak Sod. In addition to his farm income, the mushroom farmer also raises cows, fish, and frogs. Another of Khun Pak Sod's farmers has 5 rai of farm land Three rai is put in rice production for personal consumption while the other two rai are panted in GAP certified broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, long bean, or morning glory. Across the road is member of the farmer group family. They grow Chinese vegetables on 1 rai. They can make between 10-15,000 baht per month. One couple only sells cauliflower to Khun Pak Sod between November and February, when it can be grown pesticide free. During the dry months cauliflower is attacked by many insects and requires the constant application of dangerous pesticides. They continue to grow cauliflower during the hot season using conventional agricultural processes. Khun Pak Sod will not buy from him during these times.

Khun Pak Sod can control her farmers through the use of both positive and negative consequences. Like Swift Farms, she negotiates a minimum guaranteed price for vegetables grown by her farmers. This is not done to meet a regulatory requirement, but to ensure that her farmers will sell only to her and cultivate their fields in accordance to GAP or "Safety Vegetable" requirement. Khun Pak Sod maintains personal relationships with her farmers by attending important social life cycle events and periodically contributing to their village temples. (Figure 3.14) She also sponsors an annual party for all of her farmers. These are festive events with food, beer, whiskey, music, and singing. She tries to plan them around a Buddhist holiday[23] so her party can transition into the village event. During these parties prizes are given, ideas are shared, and all of the farmers can have a time to socialize. The party is anticipated all year; it's a reward for work well done. On the negative side, farmers violating the regulatory rules, or selling too often outside of her commodity network are asked to find another market.

[23] Each full moon signals a temple holiday celebration.

From Khun Pak Sod's perspective, all of her efforts to communicate with her farmers result in a complex of relationship based on familiarity, patronage and *krengchai*. There were multiplicities of reasons for her farmers to associate with her, make their transactions, or even break commitments. During her recent transition to GAP certification, Khun Pak Sod explained to me that most of her farmers attended the meetings and trainings with the specific intention of gaining more financial security. From her point of view, patronage was the most important reason why the frmers cooperated in the transition. However, although they were not particularly interested in the new certification and most did not understand, or care to understand, that the certification would help in the marketing of their vegetables, they were concerned about how she would feel about them. *Krengchai* was present in a subtle way, far overwhelmed by the need to continue the basic patronage relationship. When further questioned about this, Khun Pak Sod said that krengchai is important in maintaining farmer loyalty. Beause of the krengchai obligation, they will always sell their certified vegetables to her first. *Krengchai* helps her to fend off a potential counter-bidding assembler, a potential new patron for the farmer. The lowest affinity in the relationship is familiarity. This kind of relationship falls more along the lines of *bun khun*. It is situated apart from the business relationships of the commodity network, existing as interpersonal bonds concerning life events and other celebrations.

From my understanding, there is not one specific interpersonal aspect of relationships between the farmer and the assembler that connects the two and creates the node. Instead, there are complexities of interpersonal practices resulting in the establishment of the node. Patronage appears to affirm participation in regulatory practice, while *krengchai* maintains a commitment to transaction. What struck me as unique is that her farmers did not associate a commitment for exclusive transaction with Khun Pak Sod's effort to secure certification for their products. Once certified, a new patron may come along and claim the reward of Khun Pak Sod's efforts. Her ability to control the farmers and secure their production deroves from a long standing respect for her authority, a heart-felt undersanding that she will take care of them based on their respect for her superiority.

Figure 3.14 A Thai Buddhist temple mural describing community culture.
(In the center are two people observing Songkran. Around them are Thai villagers performing various tasks and play.)

Another San Sai farm leader, Khun DD, has seven farmers in her farm group and markets directly to San Sai Hospital. Like Khun Pak Sod, she maintains the same close relationships with her farmers, who are also all middle aged, ranging from 42 to 63 years of age. Also like Khun Pak Sod, she maintains the entire commodity network, being personally responsible for training, oversight, collection and marketing. When comparing both of these San Sai farm leaders it is clear to me how important community culture and its cultural expressions, such as *krengchai* and *chai yen*[24] are for maintaining these small, independent networks. These local, privately controlled pesticide reduced agricultural networks are based in trust, cooperation, and respect. Although *krengchai and chai yen* refer to unique features of Thai village organization, their use assumes a hierarchical power relationship, the villager uses these behaviors to avoid conflict and maintain self-control.

[24] *Chai yen* is translated as the having a cool heart. "With a cool heart, one can avoid unhappy situations and can enjoy the pleasures thereof" (Chai Podhisita, 1985: 41).

For the foreigner, *krengchai* is a nearly unobservable power at work in the Thai village. These are the Thai relational attributes that get things done and makes cooperation possible. These subtle Thai cultural attributes are what underlies the relationships of most government, NGO, and private commodity networks. Chiang Mai's NGOs and private actors need more than money to establish their commodity chains; they need to be directed by persons with respect. From the perspective of the corporation, it is the antithesis of what a commodity network is structures on. Yet it is part of the basic human understanding of the majority of Thai people who give it willingly to those perceived to be of a higher status and beneficial to one's personal livelihood.

Finally, there is one more form of power associated with *chai yen* employed by NGOs and small-scale, private business, that is close, interpersonal relationships develop within the village life. Familial titles, such as "*jay*" (Chinese) and "*pi chai*", meaning older sister, "*here*" (Chinese) and "*pi sao*" meaning older brother, are used to greet and address persons at different social status. When addressed as the Chinese form the title is more formal, but as the Thai form it brings the actor into a familial relationship. Over time, leaders become part of a superimposed extended family. These relationships create social obligations based on close, personal feelings. Another expression of this is the title "*ajarn*", or teacher, given to the director of MCC and the community worker at ISAC. They are not treated in the strictly business sense, but respected for their knowledge. Though it is not familial, the association of "*ajarn*" also comes with *krengchai* and will lead to *chai yen.* In the case of Swift Farms, these associations are not directed to persons at the corporate level, though they are extended to the local community leader.

3.9 Conclusion

These examples show that farm groups come together through power relationships. These relationships are based on:

- Direct economic incentives
- Access to markets
- Access to information
- Interpersonal relationships

In the corporate approach, power moves through the network from the corporation the farmer along access nodes. Corporations bring farmers into established commodity networks through direct economic incentives, such as the provision of farm land and providing costly international certification. As with all of the alternative agricultural networks studied, farmers are also linked to the commodity networks through contracts, providing a ready market for certified produce. Farmers must be provided with training in specific regulated production processes. Corporations have the power to provide training in both international and national regulatory processes. All of these provisions define the flow of network power which is directed and controlled by the goals and objectives of the corporation.

Interpersonal relations develop at the lowest levels, between the corporate site manager and the farmers, and *krengchai* is observer between these actors. However these relationships are very formal and not likely to be familial in nature or provide a feeling of calmness. The fact that Swift Farms has already abandoned farm groups for economic concerns demonstrates that corporation will place profits before people and can not be relied on for long-term security. As for the Mae Tha farmers and River Kwai, the relationship is limited to marketing and assistance in certification. The examples of organic agricultural corporations provided in this analysis demonstrate that the production process, product, quantity, and quality of product are controlled by corporations, power extends downward, and the farmer is reliant on outside economic forces.

The Thai government may provide direct economic incentives, such as access to land, equipment, and various agricultural inputs. In fact, it was the Thai government working with Swift Farms, and not the corporation, that provided the land in the example provided in this research. The government may also provide markets or market spaces by providing access to government facilities or the public areas adjacent to these facilities. Through MOAC, the government provides training in a wide variety of agricultural processes, including “Safety Vegetable” and GAP, but does not provide training in international forms of certification. Therefore, the government asserts the objectives of the current Thai political system. In general, farmers *krengchai* all government officials working with a village. As stated

previously, the act of *krengchai* may be to receive a benefit, as an act of politeness, to make a friend, or to avoid a potential conflict. The relationship between farmer and the government is made even more complicated by patronage, and may also include many other Thai formal and informal relationships based on obligations, respect, social order, fear, and all other concerns involving interactions of unequal power relations.

NGOs rarely offer direct economic assistance. However, NGOs may provide access to markets and price supports. Farmers participating in NGOs will receive an abundance of training and information. They will also receive national or local certification, a point to be elaborated on in the following chapter. NGOs will help the farmer understand how to gain access to many benefits form the government, as well as how to assert their rights over their land, their villages, and to obtain government services. NGOs bring with them a wide assortment of global, national, and local issues. Farmers are expected to accept and participate in promoting these objectives. The *krengchai* given to NGO leaders is similar to that given to an *ajarn*. It is formal and respectful, but does not carry with it the same degree of patronage as with the government, or does it have the distance of the corporate relationship. The *ajarn* is there to help, not to control. But control and power are assumed by the authority given to those with knowledge. This relationship becomes problematic during marketing because the relationship between *ajarn* and buyer is very different. The power of the NGO breaks down and must be re-asserted as a denial of access.

The private approach is entirely community based and rests on the complicated relations of community culture. Rarely can the private contractor offer land, or any financial assistance except for the provision of specific agricultural inputs. The private contractor provides a secure market and certification, working with the government to bring the necessary training and inspections to the farmer. The private contractor brings knowledge and coordination to the farmer, directing the farmer to cultivate specific market products produced under government certification. The private, local contractor can control the farmer though close, personal relationships built on participation in family and community events and become part of the everyday life of the farmer's household. *Krengchai* is given out of respect for knowledge, access to a market, and a plethora of personal acts of kindness received.

The private approach is inherently small-scale and difficult to find because it is discretely woven into the community, it does not stand out or desire notoriety as it seeks to maintain *chai yen* among its members.

I learned from my field research that the most successful examples of alternative agricultural commodity networks are those supporting community culture. It is about working together and cooperating with multiple levels of authority, the interplay of *krengchai, bun khun* and patronage, of doing good things and finding one's place in the world. The farmers have learned that working together in farm groups allows them to share resources and gain market share. Working with an organization such as MCC or ISAC, or cooperating with a reseller like Khun Pak Sod assures them of a market for their vegetables and provides them with other benefits, such as training, seeds, and a higher farm gate price. Cooperating with the government has provided many groups with land, nets, and organic products such as bio-extract, seeds, and buildings. Community culture is easily observed as a complex actor-network of many layers and activities. It's the Buddhist religious days of the village, the merit making for the monk, and the money tree festival for the temple. It's the weddings, births, and deaths within a village, it's the quiet time between planting and harvesting. It's essentially relationships extending through the family, into the village and out into the government and support institutions.

These interpersonal, familial relations are part of community culture and can be observed in the community markets. It's the "one on one" interaction seen in ISAC and MCC. NOSA placards proudly display pictures of the certified farmers above their market stalls at ISAC, assuring customers that they are talking with the real people in the field. All of these relationships are held together by specific agricultural practices, be they NOSA, GAP, "Safety Vegetable", or an experimental IPM process. The following chapters will expand on the importance of certified agricultural production processes and the networks which form around them. .But while regulations may be the discourse bringing together far flung coalitions to construct agricultural commodity networks, community culture is the catalyst driving the emergence into reality.