

# COMPROMISES, RISKS AND OBLIGATIONS

## PERCEPTION OF AGROCHEMICALS, IDEOLOGY AND HEALTH IN HUAIPHROM, THAILAND

In the light of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, promotion of agrochemicals was replaced with the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's concepts of Sufficiency Economy and New Theory Farming. Integrating Buddhist principles such as self-restraint and balanced consumption, these concepts aimed at making Thailand's farmers self-sufficient and resilient towards market fluctuations and potential crises.

**This research explores the rationales behind agricultural practices in Huai Phrom, a small village located in Northeastern Thailand, which is promoted as the subdistrict's frontrunner village for practicing Sufficiency Economy.**

### HOMEGARDEN AND FIELD: A DICHOTOMOUS AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

Huai Phrom's dominant agricultural practice is characterized by home gardens used for subsistence agriculture, and fields used for cultivating cash crops. Agrochemicals constitute the cardinal distinction, as villagers refrain from using them for their home gardens due to a concern of health, but rely on them for cultivation of their fields. Circles of debt and dependency on income are found to be underlying rationales behind the villagers' willingness to use agrochemicals despite the perception that it could potentially risk their health.



“ I guess I didn't do anything differently after Sufficiency Economy, because I already did it before it was even there. ”

### INSTITUTIONAL OR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE?

As most farmers would credit their agricultural knowledge to derive from the King's ideas on Sufficiency Economy, they would simultaneously argue that it derived from their local community prior to the late King's ideas on being self-sufficient. Hence, informants appeared to subscribe to coexisting - yet contradicting - narratives on where they had acquired their agricultural knowledge from.



“ The monks want people and society to heal. When villagers grow plants, they can sell the vegetables and get money. Then, the villagers will consider themselves valuable to society. ”

### AGRICULTURE WITH A HIGHER PURPOSE

Amongst officials affiliated with Huai Phrom and monks at Huai Phrom's local temple, it was found that a strong discourse appeared to prevail in the link between mental health, agriculture and being valuable to society. Consequently, villagers appeared urged to regard their agricultural practice in regards to society and individual livelihoods simultaneously.



### CONCLUSION

In Huai Phrom, rationales behind the agricultural practices consist of an interplay between dependency on market forces, state incentivized policy-making and ideological approaches to agriculture. Villagers' concern of health, agrochemicals and notions on food safety is ultimately found to be a product contradicting narratives and discourses, rooted in historical shifts in national policy-making.

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