

THAILAND

Ar Promtaisong

In 1989, when a typhoon in the Gulf of Thailand killed several of his friends, Ar Promtaisong gave up the risk-filled life of a fisher and went back to his family's rice farm in Thailand's Rayong Province.

But after a few years laboring on solid ground, Ar found himself sinking deeper and deeper into debt.

Debt is a problem that plagues farmers around the world. Ar's tale was typical. He did not know how to manage the high cost of chemical fertilizers and pesticides compared to the low prices he was paid for his rice.

But when Ar was at his wits' end, and ready to sell his land, Thailand's Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

The bank would agree to delay his debt repayment for three years. However, Ar would have to attend a workshop on the Sufficiency Theory developed by His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

It was the best move he ever made.

The late king's Sufficiency Theory is a practical guide for integrated organic and resilient farming. Instead of mono-cropping, it teaches farmers to diversify. They grow rice, fruits, vegetables, and raise poultry, fish, and livestock if possible.

And they do it in harmony with the environment, without buying expensive chemicals.

Although it was hard at first to adjust, Ar soon got the hang of it. He even paid off his debt ahead of schedule.

Ar says he would not have succeeded without support and advice from his village head and a district agriculture official. Then Ar decided to support and advise others.

He helped organize a "Natural Agriculture Group." The members shared ideas and developed their own natural products. They pooled resources and started their own rice mill so they could keep more of what they earn.

Ar and his group teach others what they have learned. That has helped everyone.

Hunger was not uncommon in Rayong when Ar began farming. "There are no hungry people in my village now," he says.

Mr. Ar Promtaisong, please!