

AGRICULTURAL EVANGELISM

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor"



Special Thailand Trip Report: May 2006

Bangladesh • Guatemala • Haiti • India • Moldova • Nepal • Niger • Philippines • Rwanda • Senegal • Thailand • Vietnam

Dear Friends in Christ,

I WANT TO THANK ALL OF YOU for making this ministry to the poor of God's kingdom a reality. It was my privilege to visit Asia this past January and February. My first stop was Bangladesh. We have three excellent programs helping Christians in various parts of that country. Many families have been given an opportunity to work and give their way out of poverty and God's kingdom has prospered because of this. The purpose of this visit was to evaluate a new area and a growing outreach for a possible fourth program. The leadership there shared a real excitement for our approach and it appears that this growing group will be a good fit for FARMS.

From Bangladesh, I traveled to northern Thailand, where we have two loan programs helping various tribal Christians. One is helping the Lahu people and the other is with the Hmong and Mien people. Each program was doing very well and I was very encouraged by the obvious impact the programs were having. The peoples of northern Thailand share borders with unreached countries that need the Gospel. It is always our prayer that those we help will share what they have in Jesus and in many ways, this is already happening.

In this newsletter, I will share three of the many exciting testimonies I recorded while visiting our Hmong-Mien program. God has truly blessed this program in remarkable ways. I trust you enjoy their testimonies and this report.

In Christ's Service,

Joseph E. Richter
Executive Director



Hmong-Mien Program Synopsis

OUR HMONG-MIEN PROGRAM was started in 1998.

Mike P., is a resident missionary, involved in training leaders and overseeing church planting efforts among tribal groups in northern Thailand. Even though, many were coming to Christ through this ministry, their economic situation was still extremely difficult. Mike wanted to find help for them, but not the kind of help that would foster dependency. When Mike was



Mike P., missionary, with Mr. Yang and sample of his musical instrument craft

introduced to the self-help approach of FARMS, he agreed to form an indigenous committee. The program started with seven families and has now has given loans to over 233 families. The average loan has been about \$400. Because the loans are revolved, \$103,125 in loans has actually been given out of their total loan fund of just \$29,000! In addition, the estimated income generated from this one program would be up to \$1,000,000 and growing! Therefore, it is easy to understand the power of revolving loans as a means of poverty elimination. Furthermore, when you combine this approach with our tithing requirement, you see families growing spiritually and their churches prospering!

The FARMS Hmong-Mien committee is presently helping 113 families with loans, with a goal of helping 200 families at any given time! Most of these tribal families were either resettled from refugee camps or were forcibly relocated due to the Vietnam War. The majority live near the Laotian border in hill top villages and face extreme economic hardships. Because of their refugee status, they are not helped in the same way as normal Thai citizens. It is a great privilege to work with these hard working and generous Christians.

In Their Own Words!

INTERVIEW: HMONG FARMER

Shuwa is a Hmong man living near Chiang Kham in northeast Thailand. He is one of the original loan applicants and the transformation of his life has been amazing. He is a very humble, hard working family man with a gentle spirit. This was my second time to visit him and to see his project. God has certainly blessed him even beyond expectation. Following is part of our interview with Shuwa.



Mr. Shuwa showing Joe Richter some of his plum fruits

Note: Shuwa has used SALT technology (Slopping Agricultural Land Technology) to improve the hillside land he acquired. This organic approach, using contours and nitrogen fixing trees, has produced a highly prolific site for agriculture. On his site, he has two fishponds, several vegetable plots and about 140 fruit trees. He has done very well and his future is much more secure.



Shuwa's orchard and garden



Mr. Shuwa and some of his squash

Shuwa: "Four times I have received loans from the FARMS committee. I don't know about other people, but my experience has been very good! I have seen very good fruit from the FARMS program. So, what you see around us is the result of the FARMS program." [A four-acre hillside orchard and vegetable farm.] "Before I received this money from the FARMS program, I was a very poor person. My family was very poor. It has really improved my life in many ways."

Question from Mr. Suwang, Committee Chairman: "Has it been a benefit to the local church?" "Oh, yes, it has been a real benefit to the local church because I give 10% of all my profits to the church." **Question:** "When you give 10% to the Lord do you see that the Lord blesses you in any way?" **First answer:** "Yes, I have more peace and more joy in my life." **The chairman adds,** "You also have a new truck!" "Oh, yes I do now have a truck, which I was never able to afford before." [Shuwa only had a bicycle when FARMS began to help him.] **Question:** "Do you have anything to say to Joe Richter?" "I just think that

the FARMS program is a real benefit to us Christians that have had difficult times. It helped us get started. Also, what I have found is that if you are sincere with God and use what God gives you, God will bless."

INTERVIEW: HMONG INSTRUMENT MAKER

Mr. Yang lives in a Hmong refugee resettlement village. He has a plain home, but his joy in life is very evident. The bamboo instruments he makes are traditional Hmong. They are used at various occasions, especially funerals. There is a high demand for these quality instruments, even in the USA.

Question: "What was your life like before you had a FARMS project?" "We had many ideas and many desires, but we had no money to do anything. Not until FARMS helped our family. Before I had a chance to borrow this money, I could survive. But, it was very difficult; sometimes I was just working for people. Sometimes, I would just go out to the jungle and get things to eat. It was just a day-by-day



Mr. Yang Demonstrating how bamboo is bored to make a musical instrument



Bamboo boring tools

type of thing, I never really had any type of vocation or anything, and I could never get ahead."

Question: "How did you hear about the FARMS program?" "I asked at the Bible School, when I was studying in Chiang Kham [Mike P's training school], if there was any type of project that I could borrow money to could help our family get ahead. My teacher said that I should ask about the FARMS loan program. So, I went to the committee and they helped me with a loan. Previously, I was a silver smith and exported jewelry to the United States. But now, I changed my project to making traditional bamboo musical instruments. Our family now actually has a project that makes enough money, so that our family can actually live, have things to eat, good food, and do things we like. I just really like to say thank you for the FARMS program, it has been a real blessing to our family."



Mr. Wang crafts silver jewelry for export to the USA.



Mr. Jur and his family, one boy missing.

his business had grown. He now has hired several other men. He has a wife and four children. Mr. Jur and his wife are a very hard working couple with a real love for the Lord Jesus.

"Before I worked with a FARMS project, I worked with silver. This was eight or nine years ago. I also did these musical instruments. I found that making these instruments was a good profit-making venture and with a good profit margin and a lot of money could be made. [The price of silver has made silver smithing much less

profitable.] It has been about 8 years that I have been making these instruments. It has been a real blessing and I continue to make a good profit out of them. Actually, my profit is between 100,000 to 150,000 Baht per year. [\$2,500 to \$3,750, which is high for his situation] This has made it possible for me to buy a brand new motorcycle, actually my second motorcycle, and to work on my new house and make it very nice. My long-term goal is actually to buy a pickup truck. The idea for the truck is so that we could use it to send people around to do evangelism."

"I just really want to extend a thank you to the FARMS loan program; it has been a real blessing. I know it has not been easy and I know there are sacrifices on Joe's part and the people there [USA]. I just really appreciate what they have done for us. Last thing that I would like to say is thank you very much and that this FARMS program would grow and become a blessing to many just as it has for us."



Close up of hand crafted silver jewelry

SECOND HMONG MUSICAL INSTRUMENT PROJECT

Mr. Jur was also one of the original FARMS loan recipients. Like many others in his village, he was resettled from a refugee camp in Thailand. This was my second time to visit him and I was very impressed at how



Mr. Jur with some of his bamboo instruments



Mr. Jur and new motorcycle made possible by FARMS project earnings



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FARMS Welcomes Emebet Davies:

EMEBET DAVIES has recently joined the team of FARMS International as our Staff Accountant. Emebet became a Christian in her home country of Ethiopia during the repressive Marxist rule of Mengistu's regime. She has lived in the USA for the past 15 years. Emebet lost her husband shortly after her son, Gabe (7), was born. She and her son reside in Duluth, Minnesota.

Emebet has a very accomplished background in business accounting and banking and we are very glad have her join the team. Her heart's desire is to use her talents to serve the poor of God's kingdom.



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