

Agribusiness and the Cycle of Debt: Let Me Tell You About Thailand's Rice Farmers

By [Tony Cartalucci](#)

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Farmers in Thailand have found themselves at the center of a long, protracted political struggle pitting Thailand's traditional establishment against a "populist" upstart backed by foreign interests.

The resulting spotlight farmers now find themselves in is an opportunity to share their plight with a wider audience and by doing so, perhaps receive the care and attention they so badly need and rightfully deserve.

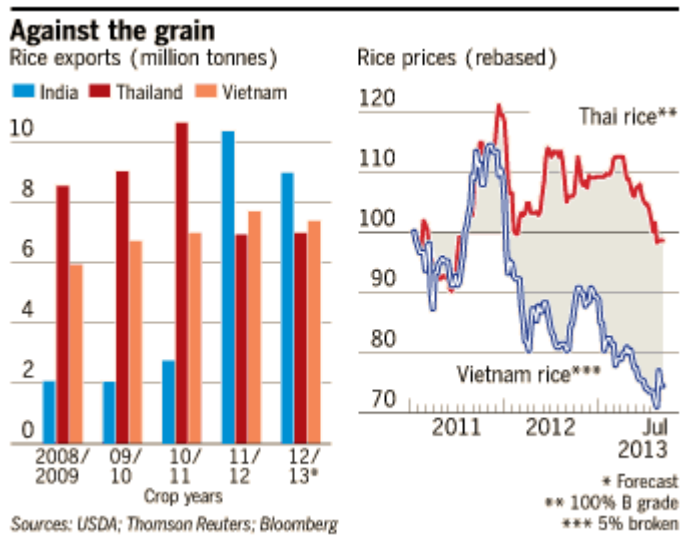


Image: Rice farmers in Phitsanulok province were threatened by regime "red shirts" to end their protest. Often cited [by the Western media in their "class divide" narrative](#), it is now clear the nation's farmers were simply used to get Thaksin Shinawatra back into power, and that the violence and intimidation usually reserved for his political opponents is now being turned on them in the wake of being cheated by his vote-buying rice subsidy scam. Rice farmers have already turned in their rice, but have not been paid for it for half a year - in other words - they were robbed. (Photo by Chinnawat Singha)

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The current regime of Thaksin Shinawatra built its political machine on the backs of Thailand's rice farmers - with the vast majority of its support being drawn from the populous rice growing regions in the north and northeast of Thailand. It has done so by offering short-sighted, ill-conceived "populist" policies that have predictably collapsed in a whirlwind of corruption, incompetence, scandal, and financial ruination.

In particular were rice subsidies. Farmers, who were promised above-market prices for their rice, [have not been paid since October](#) and have been [dealing with slashed prices](#) since the vote-buying scheme began to collapse last summer.



The rice buying scheme has gone bankrupt, with warehouses full of unsold, [rotting rice that has been declared unfit for human consumption](#) by many of Thailand's traditional importers. Because of this, Thailand's leading position in Asia as a premier rice exporter [has fallen in terms of both quality and quantity](#).

Having failed to sell the rice, efforts to raise capital to pay farmers by selling bonds has been tried – [and has also failed](#) – with the first round failing to raise even half of the money required to perpetuate the scheme. Another round of bonds was scheduled for January 2014, but fared even worse.

The regime's populist policies, and the rice subsidies in particular, have left their recipients across rural Thailand destitute, desperate, and more vulnerable than ever. More importantly, they have left the rural population disillusioned with their once "people's champion," Thaksin Shinawatra and his spanning political machine. Their turning on the regime has added extra weight to ongoing protests that have hobbled the regime and is slowly undermining and dismantling it, piece by piece. In response, the shrinking fanatics still backing Thaksin Shinawatra's political dynasty have resorted to declaring the farmers as enemies, [and have turned their signature intimidation and violence onto these once stalwart supporters](#).

While the protests gladly welcome the rural poor and in particular, the rice farmers, among their ranks, winning the current political struggle by topping the regime of Thaksin Shinawatra is only a single step in the much longer journey necessary to truly deliver justice and a better life to Thailand's farmers.



Image: [Tens of thousands of rice farmers from across Thailand](#), cheated and used by the current regime of Thaksin Shinawatra have been ebbing and flowing into the capital of Bangkok in search of justice and their lost rice. Many farmers, who have grown rice their entire lives, find themselves this season for the first time in their lives, not plowing or sowing their fields in the wake of this unprecedented socioeconomic disaster.

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While there are still holdouts across the Western media claiming that the farmers continue to back the current regime in Thailand, travel in any direction outside of Thailand and one will see; from Khon Kaen to Korat, Ayutthaya to Chai Nai, from Surin to Nakhorn Sawan, and from Petchaburi to Chachoengsao – the farmers have clearly turned on the regime, and the regime’s popularity among them even at the height of Thaksin Shinawatra’s power, was both tenuous and temporary at best.

The reality that politics is not the answer to their problem is well understood by the farmers. Their mistrust for both politicians and the “democratic” system they work within has grown exponentially during the Shinawatra years. What is understood less, unfortunately, is what the best alternative might be to solving this immense problem.

The Problem Shows in Every Spoonful

Nearly every meal in Thailand consists of rice. And beyond the daily dietary needs of nearly 70 million Thais, there are the large export markets Thailand has cultivated and maintained over the decades. Rice farming, and agriculture in general, employs nearly half of Thailand’s total workforce and is an integral part of Thailand’s economy, culture, and history.

The health of Thailand’s agricultural sector is the health of Thailand as a nation in general – both figuratively, and quite literally.



Image: [Fungus and rot has set in across the country](#) where the regime of Thaksin Shinawatra has been storing rice it has collected as part of its failed rice subsidy program. Unable to sell the rice, there is absolutely no way to raise money to pay the billions owed to now destitute and desperate farmers. What rice that is not overtly tainted suffers from a lack of confidence of Thailand's traditional trading partners.

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Recent mismanagement of the agricultural industry has shaken confidence both domestically and abroad in terms of quality and in regards to health concerns. Warehouses full of rice that has remained unsold for over a year now have been [heavily fumigated and has already begun to rot](#). Importers have slapped shipments from Thailand with increased scrutiny because of this, or have shifted to other nations entirely for their rice.

Domestically, rice suspected to have originated from government warehouses is being avoided, and health conscious consumers are willing to pay more to avoid tainted rice. The socioeconomic problems resulting from the failed subsidy program are reverberating across Thai society – from the farmers and consumers themselves, to the multitude of supporting goods and services used to grow rice, including small businesses that own and operate harvesters that have gone unpaid as well as the farmers themselves.

In a desperate bid to prevent another deluge of rice harvests the regime will be unable to sell, and that will further skew the markets – the regime has attempted [to block the delivery of water to farmers via national irrigation systems](#) (by claiming a water shortage) – thus leaving farmers not only penniless, but also idle and even unable to irrigate alternative crops.

With agriculture forming such an important part of Thailand as a nation – the current problem with the industry has therefore manifested itself all across Thai society from dry, idle rice fields, to poisoned rice on the dinner table, and a growing socioeconomic problem that will have lasting effects for years to come.

Big-Agri & the Cycle of Debt

The problems faced by rice farmers have only been compounded, however astronomically, by the current regime's ill-conceived, failed vote-buying scheme. Farmers are facing increasing hardships that began long before this latest national disaster – and hope of rectifying any of them seems remote at best.

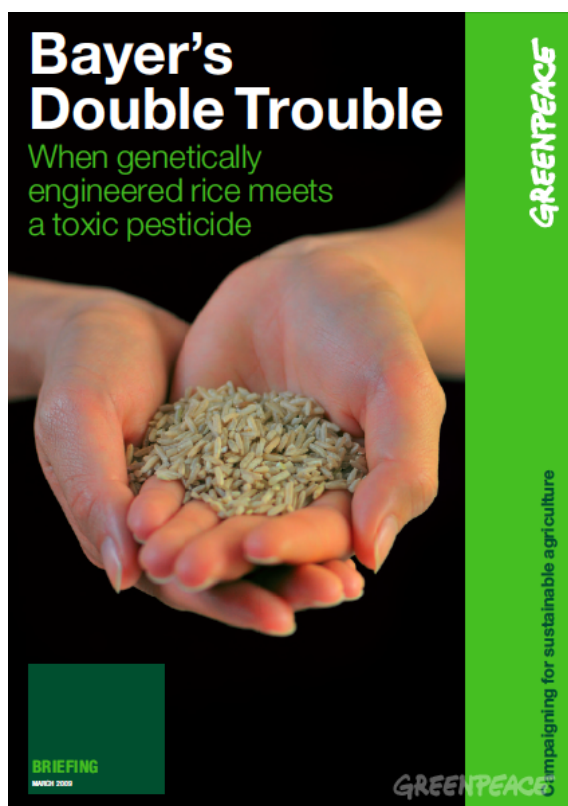


Image: Not only is Bayer's agri-poison dangerous to human health, it traps farmers in a cycle of increasing debt versus negligible gains in terms of production and quality. What's worse, is that for Thailand, use of its products, including glufosinate sold under the brand name Basta poses as a "foot in the door" for the next catastrophe in the making – the introduction of GMO rice. [See Greenpeace's report here.](#)

Another grave and growing concern is the increasing monopolies held by foreign big agricultural corporations who have set about miring Thailand's farmers in a web of debt and perpetual servitude toward chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMO).

The cycle of chemicals and industrial scale monoculture (the dependence on only a single crop) leave farmers entirely dependent on both large agricultural corporations to grow their crops, and big-retail to sell them. Despite the hype promoted by big-agri regarding their products, successful harvests are not guaranteed, and monoculture farmers find themselves particularly vulnerable when their one and only crop fails for whatever reason – be it in the field or in the market place, from weather or from political scandal.

And while big-agri has created hardships for farmers worldwide, in Thailand particularly, foreign corporations are selling poison to farmers long-ago banned in the very countries exporting them abroad.

Germany's Bayer AG, for example, is the producer of the Basta/Liberty (glufosinate) herbicide. [It is being phased out in the European Union](#) within which Germany resides – as it is found hazardous to human health. However, [Bayer gladly continues promoting and selling it to farmers in Thailand](#), knowing well that the government, particularly the current regime of Thaksin Shinawatra who has dominated Thai politics for over a decade, will never challenge the safety or impact its poison poses to Thailand, its people, and the genetic integrity of its agricultural heritage.

The chemicals are expensive and farmers, unable to produce their own pest and weed controls, or formulate their own fertilizers, must buy them from big-agri corporations season to season. With the already risky prospect of crop failures and political schemes threatening their annual income, the necessity to constantly hand cash over to big-agri compounds the risk of falling into and remaining perpetually mired in debt.

No Education, No Options

The ability for the regime to trick farmers into supporting it in exchange for unsustainable, ill-conceived subsidies that were easily predicted long before they were implemented as being disastrous, and for big-agri to market unnecessary and dangerous poison to farmers all stems from a lack of education.

The average farmer in Thailand possesses an education ranging between 3rd and 6th grade. While farmers are just as intelligent as any other member of society, their lack of knowledge leaves them vulnerable to the schemes of big business and their collaborators in big government. Many realize the need for an alternative, but lack the resources to formulate and execute one.

The ability to diversify economic activity away from dangerous monoculture practices, to recognize dangerous political schemes, and to find healthy and superior alternatives to the poison peddled by big-agri hinges on acquiring and leveraging knowledge. Either by design or through utter incompetence, or a tragic combination of the two, for the last decade while other nations' farmers adopted modern technology, techniques, and developed improved, local and independent marketing models to improve their lives, Thailand's farmers remained mired in hopeless dependence on antiquated and ultimately failing practices. Where innovation and progress should have developed, precarious and poorly designed subsidies designed solely to keep Thaksin Shinawatra and his various proxies in power were placed instead.

The hope of a better future was taken from the hands of the farmers themselves, and put instead into the shallow, meaningless campaign slogans of a corrupt political regime that never had any intention to truly make good on its promises.

The Nightmare of False Hope

Subsidies are artificial, and at best, temporary solutions to a problem demanding more substantial, pragmatic, and permanent action. Dependence on subsidies, particularly when dealing with agricultural products that are exported in an increasingly competitive global market is a sure formula for failure. So sure are subsidies to fail, that before the first cash was handed out to Thailand's rice farmers, analysts warned the impending disaster that was sure to follow.

The current regime of Thaksin Shinawatra came back to power in 2011 when his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra openly ran as her brother's proxy. Despite the illegality of the Shinawatra's campaign, brother Thaksin being a convicted criminal and fugitive living abroad and therefore ineligible to function as a political party leader, the unwarranted influence the Shinawatra family has gained through its immense wealth and its ties to Wall Street and London, afforded it the impunity to run in elections and win.

Almost from the beginning, rice prices leaped ahead neighboring countries, giving Thailand's traditional trading partners an obvious choice to ditch Thai rice for more attractively priced Indian and Vietnamese rice. Soon after, quality began to suffer as what little rice could be sold was left sitting in government warehouses longer than industry standards allow. By the summer of 2013, the promised rice subsidies were being slashed in an attempt to match lower profits being made with shrinking exports and shortly after, subsidies ground to a complete halt. By the time protesters began swelling in the streets in late 2013 and early 2014, many farmers had gone over half a year without receiving compensation for rice they had already turned in.

[Deceitful promises of impending loans](#) that would finally payoff desperate farmers have been made, literally every week. Every week, the promises are predictably broken. What little money the regime has managed to scrounge from the fumes left of a once formidable agricultural industry constitute but a drop in an ocean of cash owed to farmers.

The nightmare farmers now face is growing debt while trying to cover daily expenses while clinging to the false hope offered by an incompetent regime with neither the intent nor the ability to ever pay them. Children will be pulled from school, medical expenses skipped, belts tightened around the dinner table, and any possible investment to improve the lives of farmers cheated out of their livelihood all but dashed, as weeks turn to months, and months approach a full year. Many farmers that now fully realize the scope of this disaster see little chance of ever being paid. Unable to earn money to pay off growing debts, [some farmers have begun committing suicide in a shocking and tragically growing trend](#).

And the worst aspect of the rice subsidies is not that farmers will never see the money for a year's worth or more of rice they labored to cultivate and harvest, it is that the program has been canceled, and the rice industry left in ruins – with Thailand's agricultural reputation needing years to recover. If the regime were somehow able to pay all farmers tomorrow the billions it owes them, there would still be the next harvest rice farmers will find difficult if not impossible to profit from.

With special interests across Southeast Asia rushing to implement [the ruinous "Asian Economic Community \(AEC\)"](#), life for Thai farmers will become even more difficult, with free trade agreements inundating the country's local markets with cheap crops while undercutting Thailand's exports even further. [FTA's implemented under Thaksin Shinawatra in 2003](#), including deals with China regarding the trade of garlic effectively ended commercial cultivation of the crop in Thailand permanently.

The grotesque and calculated negligence of the Shinawatra political machine's exploitation of Thailand's farmers amounts to a crime against humanity – a crime that is leaving a swath of human tragedy in its wake. Instead of siding with the farmers and holding the regime accountable for its crimes, the West has sided with the regime defending it as the "democratically elected government" of Thailand and that its crimes should not be settled by the courts, [but rather in another round of sham elections](#).



Image: An anti-regime protester prepares donations during a march organized by protest leader Suthep Thaugsuban seeking to raise money for cheated, destitute rice farmers who have been ruined by Thaksin Shinawatra and his disastrous vote-buying rice subsidy program.

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Image: Hats are hand-folded and sold at protest venues in Bangkok as an alternative means of income for farmers who have been left destitute by the regime's predatory vote-buying scheme. While many farmers continue to cling to the hope that they will eventually be paid, others are beginning to understand the full gravity of their plight and are desperately seeking alternatives, while others still, tragically take their own lives.

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While the West predictably abandons its principles in favor of propping up a regime that serves its corporate-financier interests, the protesters have begun tentative steps to help farmers, including marches through Bangkok seeking donations to help the most desperate farmers. Space has been afforded on the protesters' stages to give the farmers a voice, and vending space has been afforded to farmers to sell goods as an alternative means of income while the ongoing crisis grinds on.

While these steps are positive, and better than the empty promises continuously made and then promptly broken by the regime, they are not adequate. A larger strategy must be formulated, not only by protest leaders, but by all Thais who understand the plight of the farmers and who understand the closing window the protests serve to highlight these problems and raise greater awareness and activist across Thai society to solve them.

Solutions

While some may feel vindicated [after having long predicted](#) the inevitable and disastrous failure of Thaksin Shinawatra's ill-conceived vote-buying "rice scheme," now that it has collapsed, rice farmers are left in disarray, facing debt and the loss of their livelihood. While they join anti-regime protests in increasing numbers, the opposition must ensure that solutions to their increasing problems – both short-term and long-term – are formulated in turn.

Immediately, an interim government would need to solve the dilemma Thaksin Shinawatra's regime has left rice farmers in. This will have to be done with financial assistance the opposition is already calculating, but is only a short-term solution. Longer-term solutions will require something much more substantial and sustainable.

Self-Sufficiency Vs. Servile Dependency on Government: Fiercely independent and nationalistic, and being the only nation in Southeast Asia to avoid colonization, Thailand's sovereignty has been protected for over 800 years by its revered monarchy. The current dynasty, the House of Chakri, has reigned nearly as long as America has existed as a nation and the current king is regarded as the equivalent of a living "Founding Father." And just as it has for 800 years, the Thai Monarchy today provides the most provocative and meaningful answer to the threats facing the Kingdom – including economic ruination and poverty.

The answer of course is self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency as a nation, as a province, as a community and as a household. This concept is enshrined in the Thai King's "[New Theory](#)" or "self-sufficiency economy" and mirrors similar efforts found throughout the world to break the back of the oppression and exploitation that results from an interdependent globalized system created by [immense corporate-financier monopolies](#).

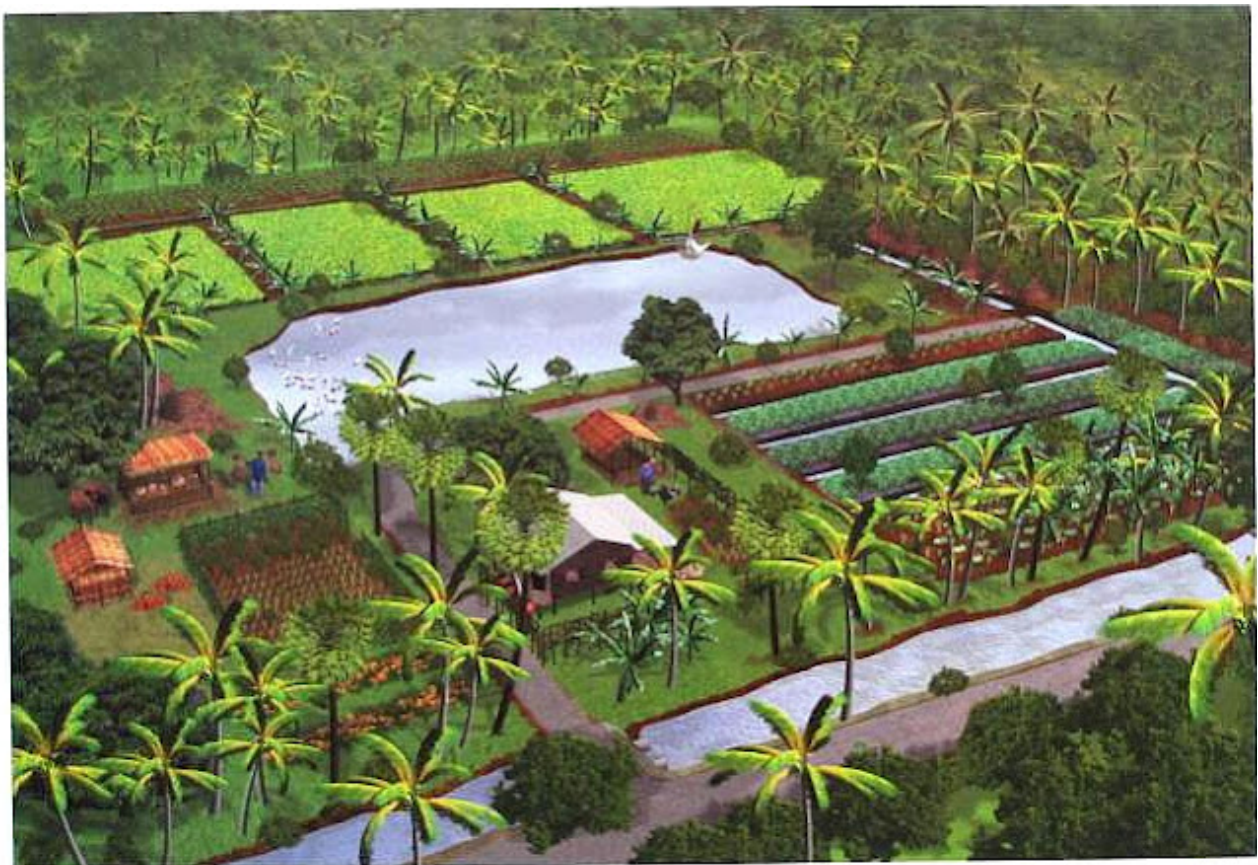


Image: A vision of self-sufficiency in Thailand. Agrarian values and the self-reliance they engender are the hallmarks of real freedom.

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STEP 1: The foundation of the self-sufficiency economy is simply growing your own garden and providing yourself with your own food. This is portrayed on the back right-hand side of

every 1,000 baht Thai banknote as a picture of a woman tending her garden.

STEP 2: The next step is producing surplus that can be traded for income, which in turn can be used [to purchase technology](#) to further enhance your ability to sustain yourself and improve your lifestyle.



Image: The Thai 1000 baht banknote. Left is one of the many dams controlling floods and producing electricity throughout the Kingdom. Center is the current King of Thailand. Right is a depiction of a local garden providing food in a self-sufficient manner.

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STEP 3: A third step is now possible – local technology cooperatives, sometimes called “[hackerspaces](#),” “makerspaces,” or “Fab Labs” (fabrication laboratories created by MIT), offer a space where people can study, learn, teach, and work on technology for a variety of purposes. Everything from entrepreneurship and the founding of tech-driven SME’s, to solving local problems and education can be accomplished with these cooperatives.

With people providing themselves their own sustenance and earning income from diversified agricultural activity, the introduction of technology and the skills necessary to utilize it, can further expand economic activity into non-agricultural sectors.

People with the knowledge, skills, and tools to physically shape the world around them, do not need to depend on others “elected” to do it for them. They do not need to gamble their lives and livelihoods on promises made by dubious politicians, but can take into their own hands their fate and fortunes, which would seem the very essence of true freedom.

Technology as Real Empowerment: Bringing this sort of technology to rural people, enabling people to create their own technology rather than just employ it, is not just a concept on paper for tomorrow, but is a reality of today. MIT Professor Dr. Neil Gershenfeld has developed the “fabrication laboratory” or “Fab Lab.” The Fab Lab is a microfactory that can “make almost anything.” His Fab Lab has since been replicated all over the world, [especially in far-flung rural locations](#), in what he calls the personal fabrication revolution. It aims at turning a world of dependent consumers into independent designers and producers.

Video: Dr. Neil Gershenfeld presents his Fab Lab at TED.

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Dr. Gershenfeld in his own words articulates the problem of finding support amongst institutions and governments, stating that individuals are very enthusiastic about this revolution “but it breaks their organizational boundaries. In fact it is illegal for them, in many cases, to equip ordinary people to create rather than consume technology.”

Dr. Gershenfeld goes on to encapsulate the true potential of his Fab Labs by stating, “the other 5 billion people on the planet aren’t just technical “sinks,” they are “sources.” The real opportunity is to harness the inventive power of the world to locally design and produce solutions to local problems.” Dr. Gershenfeld concludes by conceding he thought such a possibility was 20 years off, but “it’s where we are today,” noting the success his Fab Labs are already having around the world.



Image: The interior of a “Fab Lab” [in Amsterdam](#), featuring a array of personal manufacturing technology.

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Dr. Gershenfeld’s message resonates with the current culture of Thailand and the ambitions of the “self-sufficiency economy.” In many ways, Thailand’s patchwork of micro-businesses, already successfully by-passing capital intensive centralized production, vindicates the work and optimism of Dr. Gershenfeld. The technical possibility for this to change the world is

already a reality, but Dr. Gershenfeld himself concedes that the biggest obstacle is overcoming social engineering – in other words – creating a paradigm shift in the minds of the population to meet the technical paradigm shift that has already taken place.

To do this, people must realize that the power to change their lives lies not in stuffing ballots into boxes on election day, but within their own hands, minds, and within local institutions like Fab Labs and hackerspaces.

Bringing Economic Diversity Through Technology to Rural Farmers: For Thais, they do not need to wait for MIT to bring technology cooperatives to rural communities. This is something that can and is already being done with independent hackerspaces all around the world. In Bangkok, there is already at least two – [CITEC](#) & [Bangkok Hackerspace](#). For now they are mainly IT and electronic centric, but augmenting them with 3D printers, CNC equipment, laser cutters and other means of design and fabrication is just a matter of will and time.

The most relevant solutions to come out of a technology cooperative may look a lot like the Open Source Ecology's (OSE) "[Global Village Construction Set](#)." Unlike many uses of the term "global," the concept behind OSE is not a centralized solution, but rather the leveraging of open source hardware on a localized level to achieve a "greater distribution of the means of production," with tools that would "last a lifetime, not designed for obsolescence."

Below is the 2011 TED talk given by OSE founder and director, Marcin Jakubowski, who set out to prove that "industrial productivity can be achieved on a small scale," through the use of simple, DIY-built tools ranging from brick presses to tractors and beyond. Jakubowski himself was a struggling farmer who found himself constantly falling behind just trying to break even. Dependency on technology and supplies offered by big businesses left him in spiraling debt – a story not unfamiliar to many Thais.

Jakubowski hopes to "unleash massive amounts of human potential," through empowering people directly with the knowledge and tools necessary for they themselves to build the world they choose to live in, not merely pulling levers in a polling booth for corrupt politicians to decide for them under the guise of "democracy." The OSE project has continued to grow since the 2011 TED talk. It is not only OSE that people should study and raise awareness for – but the concept that drives OSE – namely open source hardware, and the profound implications it has for empowering individuals and communities.



Image: Typical political solutions have lofty mission statements, vague goals, and what seem to be perpetually postponed payoffs. The Open Source Ecology's "Global Village Construction Set" has real hardware they have designed, built, tested, and now share with the world for free – in what is part of a burgeoning open source hardware movement.

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Accelerating this paradigm shift requires simply putting down our political crusades and picking up pragmatic solutions instead. The key to improving our socioeconomic prospects lies not in electing representatives to carry out vague political agendas, but through physical production, moving dirt, cutting metal, and harnessing electrons.

OSE [has a website](#), a [Wiki](#) with information on a growing number of open source designs and potential concepts, as well as [a 300 page .pdf book](#) containing all the information on the prototypes already built and in use by OSE members.

Hackerspaces in both Bangkok and spread into Thailand's rural provinces using an open source franchise model, could help introduce the skills of design and fabrication along with the tools necessary for farmers to augment their current activities and create the means to diversify and expand their economic activity. This includes producing local milling equipment to cut out profiteering middlemen and other means of processing their produce to distribute and profit from on their own.

To begin a hackerspace, all one needs are friends, a space, some tables and chairs, along with your own computers. From there, knowledge can be shared and IT skills imparted on each other and interested members of the community. Hackerspaces usually fund themselves through monthly memberships and may also augment income with classes and workshops. The space can also be used for traditional tutoring services.

As time goes on, kits and basic tools can be brought in and offered to members. Eventually,

through partnerships with local and national industry, community members, and thoughtful investment of monthly dues, a fully equipped hackerspace can be constructed and a wider range of meaningful activities carried out.

With an open source franchise – one need not work to open hundreds of hackerspaces all over Thailand and implement projects like the “Global Village Construction Set” themselves – with the “DNA” of the project put out into the public for free, others can replicate successful hackerspaces already in operation, and spread across Thailand developing in parallel. For rural provinces, hackerspaces might be started in small cities and schools, before branching out further.

Understanding the potential social progress that can come from hackerspaces, and viewing them not as “clubs,” but as localized institutions of education, training, production, and many other essential services once the monopoly of centralized politicians, can open the door to unprecedented local and personal empowerment.

The Final Goal of Technology Transfers: Ultimately the goal is the creation of a population that has the skills and tools needed to solve their own problems pragmatically, and most importantly – permanently. There would be no line waiting for government handouts that were never coming. In such a paradigm, rice farmers would have already augmented their rice production with other means to bolster both their monthly wages and their quality of life.

Low rice prices would be of lesser concern if they were able to collaborate and engage in other economic activities that were more profitable. With access to IT technology and the training to use it, market research, connecting with potential customers both locally and beyond, and identifying new opportunities would be a simple task – compared to now, where this would be unthinkable for many rural Thais.

Again, each village would not need to figure out how to do this on their own. A central, open repository of knowledge and successes from around the country (or world even) would be available online for others to search and duplicate.

It is a longer-term solution that cannot be implemented overnight, but if Thais began working on it now, it could begin benefiting people before the year’s end – even if it were only at first, imparting pragmatic IT skills to help educate and connect rural farmers and craftsmen with potential markets and opportunities.

While the current political struggle aims [at toppling a despotic regime](#) that has squatted on the rural poor for over a decade leaving them as needy and dependent as ever, we must focus not only on how to immediately dress the wounds inflicted by the regime, but also the long-term rehabilitation from a decade of damage it has carried out. Reforming Thailand’s Food Paradigm: The existing food paradigm in Thailand is a creation of the interests that constructed it. From magazines and TV programs, to advertisements and big-agri distribution networks and “training” seminars – the dissatisfying and ultimately inadequate system by which we produce, distribute, and consume our food is driven by a small handful of powerful interests, not the vast majority left subjected to this current system.

To change this, we must assume ownership of every stage within food production, processing, distribution, marketing, and consumption.

Direct Action Committees (DACs) can be organized by existing groups of protesters already gathering together to attend and support protest activities. These committees can organize with farmers from provinces they themselves may come from, and open up [farmer-to-city markets](#) at both the protest sites themselves, and across the city where produce is shipped in from the provinces and sold to urbanites as both a form of relief and a form of protest.

While DACs running farmer-to-city markets may not be a total or permanent solution, it can provide relief in addition to already ongoing efforts to give the farmers both a voice and an alternative to waiting for a regime that has no plan or possible way to make good on its broken contracts.

Produce sold at protest sites grown by farmers cheated by the regime will only further solidify the legitimacy of the protest itself, while turning it from a purely political movement to one of pragmatic potential. Protesters would be more likely to donate generously to relieving struggling farmers if they could get produce in return. Social events revolving around the use of the produce in lunches and dinners held at protest sites or during marches could also become a regular feature.

The regime's attempts to strangle a movement providing immediate and growing relief for cheated farmers will only compound its problems in terms of legitimacy and appeal. Arresting protest leaders and financially attacking the movement when it is the only organized force addressing the plight of farmers will be increasingly difficult for even the most adamant and dishonest of the regime's supporters to defend.



Image: From [Asia City Online's interview](#) with organic farmer and owner of Ploen Khao Baan which promotes organic farming in Thailand. Such organizations could be used to help struggling farmers find alternatives to the rice industry, now in ruins after vote-buying populist schemes have collapsed in scandal and corruption.

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DACs that regularly meet each week may produce other alternatives and ideas – collecting money to send farmers on trips to learn organic farming – giving them new skills and expanding their economic activity above and beyond the rice industry destroyed by the Thaksin regime. As described in “[Modern Organic Farming in Thailand](#),” organizations like [Khao Kwan Foundation](#) and [Ploen Khao Baan](#) have already been established to help farmers improve their lives through skills, improved market value, and economic diversification. As these ideas are developed and tested, more permanent networks can be established. Raising awareness for healthy organic food, food security, and the importance of supporting farmers directly through online journals, magazines, and other forms of media can help shift the food paradigm further. In fact, this is exactly what special interests have done to create the current and collapsing paradigm farmers are trapped in – and it is a perfect means to undo it. The ultimate winner of this political crisis will not be who can talk about the best solutions – the ultimate winner will be who actually implements the best solutions. At the moment, the protesters represent a sea of human resources, that if aware of their pragmatic potential, the power of leveraging technology rather than mere rhetoric, and organized in independent DACs, could easily win the race in both the name of their political struggle, and in the name of the nation they would like to see Thailand evolve into in the coming days, weeks, months, and years.

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