

Thai Buffaloes: Folk Value and Wisdom

Mr. Thanee Pak-Uthai
Senior Economist
Bureau of Livestock Development and Technology Transfer
Thailand

The latest survey on buffalo use in 2009 indicates that there are 5,190 farmers that use 8,170 buffaloes in their farming. This amount of buffalo use is equal to only 0.06 percent of total buffaloes in Thailand because buffaloes are replaced with agricultural machinery use. However farmers are still poor because the prices of a lot of production factors e.g. fuel, chemical fertilizer and hired labors are remaining high. Her Majesty Queen Sirikit made an order on August 11, 2008 to the government to encourage farmers to turn back to use buffaloes for reducing some farming cost and dependency on external production factors but creating value to buffaloes.

Department of Livestock then has operated activities to promote buffaloes to be community economic animal that people have to be united to conserve and develop buffaloes to most beneficial. These activities consist of the Project of Sustainable Development on Buffalo Raising System, the Project of Farmer and Buffalo Ploughing Training and the Project of Ecology Rehabilitation and Environment Conservation. The details of these projects are as follows.

1. The Project of Sustainable Development on Buffalo Raising System. This project encouraged farmers to realize the importance of buffalo use accompany with collaborate in buffalo problem solving. The activity initiated to settle a conservative and sustainable development on buffalo raising system which operated to organize a training course to farmers, ploughing training to buffalo use and settled a fund that farmers could pawn their buffaloes when they accidentally had financial problems without selling outright buffaloes. Another activity was to provide buffaloes to poor farmers for temporary borrowing or leasing them for usage. The project was also to encourage farmer to grow animal feed plants. These activities will strengthen community and encourage poor farmers to have buffaloes in ploughing in farms and rice for consuming all the year round.

2. The Project of Farmer and Buffalo Ploughing Training. In supporting the use of buffaloes on farming work, a problem is found that both farmers and buffaloes can not know how to plough as a result there was a settlement of a school of ploughing for training farmers and buffaloes which now has 13 branches countrywide. The training took 15 days to train buffaloes to pull the plough. In some provinces this ploughing training are arranged to folk wisdom course and have primary school students learn and practice as well as teach to produce ploughing instruments and benefit from buffalo manure which lead to educate youth to realize the benefit and importance of buffalo raising on their families, community, folk life, customs and cultures that are descended.

3. The Project of Ecology Rehabilitation and Environment Conservation. It is generally accepted that buffalo use can save the cost of fuel and buffalo manure that are left on the fields are good fertilizer that contain many kind of mineral nutrition for plants and help to improve soil condition to

fertile. However farmers are familiar to rice stubble burning after harvesting. This leads to soil water losing, compressive stress soil and lose mineral nutrition of Nitrogen, Phosphorus Potassium and Sulfur. The project of using buffalo to rice stubble incorporating was then settled to increase mineral nutrition in soil and decline on global warming. The study showed that 12 pilot branches or 309 farmers in 3,000 rai area could decrease the cost of fuel 132 baht in each rai or equaled to 412,900 baht per year and could produce buffalo manure as much as 660 tons annually.

Operating conclusion

Farmers in the community could happily earn their livings in the better environmental condition of farms, farmers had better income, stronger health and safe food for community consumption which had buffaloes become one part of the family. There were decreasing in chemical fertilizer use as well as fuel and dependency from external community's factors. This project strengthened community and earned sufficient living which had folk wisdom and way of life that were associated with farmers, buffaloes and rice.

Thai Buffaloes: Production and Market

Production

Buffalo quantities	In 2008 there were 1.35 buffaloes in Thailand which decreased from 1.63 buffaloes in 2003 or equaled to 3.2 percent decreasing or decreased from 4.8 buffaloes in 1993.
Farmer quantities	In 2008 there were 0.28 millions of farmers which decreased from 0.46 millions of farmers in 2003 or equaled to 4.1 percent decreasing.
Raising location	74.3 percent of buffaloes were raised in north eastern part of Thailand, 15.1 percent were raised in the northern part of Thailand, 8.3 percent were raised in the middle part of Thailand and 2.3 percent were raised in the southern part of Thailand.
Raising system	Agricultural integrated farming was conveyed to self-sufficient farming which is the system of rather focusing on value creation system than production system. Farmers will raise buffaloes for the purpose of their families' possession and receive buffalo manure as byproduct of organic fertilizer.

Processing process

Processing process	Buffalo raising industrial system consisted of 73 meat ball factories, 9 cow and buffalo processing production factories, Dog Chew, Furniture and car seat covers
--------------------	---

Marketing

Slaughtering volume	196,012 buffaloes were killed in 2008 or 540 buffaloes were killed per day. Most of consumption was in fresh meat.
Farmer's price	The price was 42.63 per kilo in 2008 which increased from 34.49 baht in 2003 in 23.60 percent.
Consumer's price	The price was 117.50 baht per kilo in 2008 which increased from 116.80 baht in 2004 in 0.15 percent
Import	We import buffaloes and products from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia

countries and products	but the import had declined because these countries' price was higher than domestic price.
Export countries and products	We export buffaloes and products to Cambodia, Vietnam and China such as car seat covers, furniture and dog chew.

Labor use

Labor use	There are 5,190 farmers and 8,170 buffaloes are used in farming in 2009.
-----------	--