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Promote health by producing and consuming vegetables in the households of Ban Thana, Khanabnak Subdistrict, Pak Phanang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the recommended daily intake of fruits and vegetables is 400 grams per person. This quantity is considered sufficient to prevent non-communicable diseases such as obesity, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. However, studies conducted in 2021 show a decline in vegetable and fruit consumption compared to 2019, which may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to reduced access to fruits and vegetables due to government-imposed work-from-home mandates, travel restrictions, and increased prices of goods, making it more challenging for people to obtain these essential items. There is a pressing need for measures and campaigns to promote better access to safe vegetables and fruits, as well as to educate people on the benefits of consuming chemical-free produce to alleviate concerns about food safety.

The community of Thana comprises 143 households, primarily engaged in rice farming, oil palm cultivation, livestock raising, and shrimp farming. Of these, 42 households grow vegetables without using chemicals, while 14 households use chemicals with an expenditure of 2,500 baht. Additionally, there are 87 households, representing 60.83%, that do not grow their own vegetables, spending about 600 baht per household per week on purchased vegetables. Many community members (80%) believe that vegetable cultivation is complicated and maintenance-intensive, impacting health, social, economic, and environmental aspects. This highlights the need for promoting chemical-free vegetable and fruit cultivation to enhance access to safe produce for families, disadvantaged individuals, and migrant workers within the community.

In this project, a working group was established to carry out activities such as group gatherings, knowledge dissemination, advocacy, and encouragement for the cultivation and consumption of chemical-free vegetables. Activities were promoted to support households in growing and consuming organically grown vegetables, with agricultural experts providing guidance on making organic compost, bio-fertilizers, and leaf and flower growth hormones.

The project also distributed planting bags and vegetable seeds, using simple and accessible media to reach all community groups, including disadvantaged individuals. A total of 115 participants understood the project objectives, and afterward, households began practicing chemical-free vegetable cultivation and consumption while continuously recording data.

The project tracked progress, held learning exchange forums, and summarized lessons learned.

Outcomes and Indicators: A capable working group was formed to manage the project, consisting of 15 members, with a clear structure and defined roles, including community leaders, village committee members, community scholars, and other groups. Households and disadvantaged community members gained knowledge about chemical-free vegetable cultivation and consumption. The project introduced environments conducive to growing and consuming chemical-free vegetables in all households, resulting in a form of vegetable gardening that used less water and soil optimized for vegetable growth. A community market for safe vegetables was established, as well as groups producing organic fertilizers and bio-fertilizers. 80% of the participating households grew at least five types of vegetables without using any chemicals: lemongrass, bird's eye chili, kaffir lime leaves, galangal, and holy basil. Each household reduced its vegetable purchasing expenses by an average of 300 baht, down from 600 baht per household per week.

The project gained increased partnerships with organizations like Walailak University's School of Nursing, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (SHPF), the Khonabnak Subdistrict Administrative Organization in Pak Phanang District, village committee representatives, village health volunteers, Khonabnak Subdistrict Health Promoting Hospital, community scholars, and community enterprise groups. Migrant workers who had moved into the community found employment as laborers in the village and used the chemical-free vegetables they grew to cook meals for their household members, ensuring that everyone received safe and nutritious food.

The project successfully demonstrated that community-based initiatives can effectively promote the production and consumption of chemical-free vegetables. By addressing barriers to vegetable cultivation and improving access to safe produce, the project not only contributed to better health outcomes but also fostered greater community engagement and collaboration. This model serves as a valuable example for other communities aiming to enhance food security and health through sustainable agricultural practices.

