

Cooperation Creating and Smallholder Farmers Developing towards Sustainable Palm Oil Production through RSPO Standards

The project, is led by Asst. Prof. Dr. Somjai Npueng from Walailak University's School of Accountancy and Finance. This is one of education outreach activities of Walailak University that aims to support Thai smallholder farmers, in adopting sustainable palm oil production practices according to the international Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) standards. This initiative is crucial because most smallholders lack access to the necessary knowledge, skills, and certifications to manage their farms efficiently, leading to limited market opportunities and lower economic returns. By enabling farmers to meet RSPO standards, the project seeks to improve their production processes, reduce costs, and give them access to higher-value markets both domestically and internationally.

For smallholder farmers in Thailand, adopting these standards means not only improved farming practices but also greater profitability, as certified sustainable palm oil fetches higher market prices and provides access to the global Palm Trace system, where farmers can sell credits earned from sustainable production.

The project aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those focused on poverty reduction and zero hunger, environmental sustainability, and economic development. Its key objectives include building partnerships with external agencies to support sustainable palm oil production, transferring knowledge to smallholder farmers, group leaders, and palm oil processors, and creating a mentoring system to help farmers maintain RSPO standards and sell their credits on the international market. These goals are being pursued in collaboration with involved actors in palm oil supply chain.

To implement the project, a series of workshops and training sessions with tailored lecturers and programed project, focusing on sustainable farming practices, financial management, and the technical aspects of RSPO certification. In addition, the meeting and brainstorming about the guidelines for upgrading to sustainable palm oil. Oil palm group leaders were trained to support and guide their communities, ensuring that the knowledge is passed on effectively. This "train the trainer" model will help scale the project's impact across oil palm farming communities. The project has linked to academic and research implications as well. It integrates with ongoing research into sustainable palm oil value chains in Surat Thani Province, particularly through partnerships with the RSPO and local enterprises.

The outcomes of the project are significant in driving sustainable palm oil. By the end of the project period, farmers and group leaders will have received training in sustainable palm oil

production. In addition to gaining new skills, these farmers will also benefit from increased networking opportunities and stronger relationships with palm oil processing plants. Economically, farmers are expected to see increased productivity and reduced costs, leading to higher incomes. Environmentally, the adoption of sustainable practices will help mitigate negative impacts on local ecosystems, promoting the responsible use of resources such as fertilizers and chemicals.

The project also aims to strengthen academic collaboration between Walailak University and the RSPO, further advancing research and community service initiatives. The university's role in the project not only benefits the farmers but also enhances its capacity to contribute to local economic development and sustainability efforts. Ultimately, the project will drive a transition in Thailand's palm oil sector toward more sustainable and economically viable practices, creating lasting benefits for smallholder farmers and the broader agricultural economy.