



Statement Vitoon Panyakul, Geschäftsführer des langjährigen GEPA-Bio-Reispartners Green Net

Dear guests,

My name is Vitoon Panyakul, I am the Executive director of Green Net in Thailand. I studied agriculture and horticulture science in Bangkok because I was interested in nature but also interested in helping small scale farmers. So I went to study economics development as a master degree in Australia. When I came back I started working in an NGO to help small scale farmers to do sustainable farming. Yet, soon I realized that helping farmers with technical knowledge on farming is not enough. We would need to work on providing market access for farmers as well. So I quit the NGO and started Green Net 23 years ago. From then on, we have been pioneer in organic farming in the country. We help many group producer groups and even business and government agencies to develop organic agriculture promotion programmes. We also work with many groups in South East Asia, in Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia to help support organic farming there.

Green Net is a Thai social enterprise and we work mainly on two principles: organic farming and fair trade. We first had contact with a Swiss fair trade group; now it is called CLARO. Then we got to know other fair trade groups in Europe such as GEPA in Germany, CTM in Italy and Oxfam in Belgium. As to GEPA, it started with a small volume, not even one container, 23 years ago, and now GEPA is buying about 60 tons of rice from us per year. What GEPA and other European fair trade groups buy from us is consumer ready packed rice. This enables us to support more job opportunities and income earnings for our farmers because most of our workers in our packing unit are also organic farmers themselves. Growing rice you don't need to go to the field every day, you have spare time. They only need to work more during the growing and the harvesting time. Nowadays of course, harvesting is already mostly done by tractors combined with machine. So most of the rice farmers do not survive economically on just producing and selling rice but they have to find income-supplementary jobs.

We also started to sell other products like coconut milk and we are working on other products that could be offered in the future. Diversification of production is crucial to make sure that farmers become less vulnerable to climate change and also have a better buffer for their income than depending on the rice crop alone. We financially and technically assist our member farmers to diversify their production starting from seed to support through growing techniques and to market access.

As I just said, climate change is one of our main challenges these days because farming depends on the working conditions. Our farmers only grow one rice crop a year. Climate change forces our farmers to shift their production because the rain starts later than usually. Since the crop is sensitive to daylight and will start to flower when the daylight gets shorter – which is around the end of October – the growing period for the rice becomes shorter and shorter and therefore it will affect the crop in the long run.

Organic farming is probably the only way out for helping small scale farmers and has the opportunity to protect the world from climate change because we work to improve soil and water, as well as agro eco system, we protect biodiversity and so the crop itself becomes more tolerant to drought or other climate variations. With better soil fertility, more moisture can be kept in the soil so the crop can last longer in the organic farm than in the conventional farm. By switching to organic farming you not only reduce energy use but you can also fix greenhouse gas, particularly carbon dioxide. So organic farming is probably the cheapest and most effective way for climate mitigation.

Nevertheless, our farmers suffer from crop yield loss due to climate change. Fair trade can help to compensate for damages which, for example, are caused by drought or flooding. Since the last 5 years, we offer some income compensation for farmers whose rice crops are damaged by abnormal weather.

I see fair trade as a partner, as a friend. The cooperation is more than just a business. We have a strong belief that we work together for a better world, for the farmers. In the past many private businessmen went around the villages asking farmers to produce. Quite often they sold seed and fertilizers.. They may even set up a big credit system. Yet many farmers faile the grading and therefore got a much lower price. So there is many unfair practices in agricultural trade. That is why we set up a cooperative so that the farmers themselves become members of the cooperative and can voice their concerns directly with the management.

On my trip through Germany this time, I try to raise consumer awareness for fair trade. I am happy to see young people interested in these kind of issues. Please let me take the opportunity to thank GEPA and all the volunteers in world shops for their commitment all these years. Without your support fair trade would not have been such a success today. But please remember that they are many more farmers out there still left out and we would need to work harder together so that they can also enjoy fair livelihood.