

Quality of Life of the Farmers Enrolling in Thailand's Rice Pledging Scheme

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in Thailand's rice pledging scheme and the factors affecting their life satisfaction. Regarding research methodology, a quantitative field survey was carried out to collect the data. The multi-stage sampling technique was applied to draw 2,115 samples from the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme in the following four regions: 1) the northern region (Chiang Mai and Phitsanulok), 2) the eastern region (Ayutthaya and Nakhon Nayok), 3) the northeastern region (Ubon Ratchathani and Surin), and 4) the southern region (Nakhon Si Thammarat).

The results revealed that most of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme had a moderate to relatively high level of satisfaction, which accounted for 96.5%. It was also found that they had the highest satisfaction on family well-being, followed by happiness in life, standard of daily living, environmental surroundings, and leisure and recreation. The factors affecting the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme were income, family, standard of daily living, and satisfaction towards the rice pledging scheme.

Keyword: Life Satisfaction, Farmers Enrolling in the Rice Pledging Scheme, Quality of Life

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คุณภาพชีวิตของเกษตรกรภายใต้โครงการจำนำข้าว

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา คุณภาพชีวิตของเกษตรกรภายใต้โครงการจำนำข้าว มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาคุณภาพชีวิตของเกษตรกรภายใต้โครงการจำนำข้าว โดยมีระเบียบวิธีวิจัย คือ ข้อมูลที่นำมาศึกษาเป็นข้อมูลการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ จากการสำรวจ (Filed Survey) สุ่มตัวอย่างเกษตรกรที่เข้าโครงการจำนำข้าว โดยวิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบหลายขั้นตอน (Multi-Stage Sampling) ประกอบด้วย 4 ภาค คือ ภาคเหนือ จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ จังหวัดพิษณุโลก ภาคกลาง จังหวัดพระนครศรีอยุธยา จังหวัดนครนายก ภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ จังหวัดอุบลราชธานี จังหวัดสุรินทร์ ภาคใต้ จังหวัดสงขลาและจังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช ขนาดตัวอย่าง 2,115 ตัวอย่าง

จากการศึกษา พบว่า เกษตรกรภายใต้โครงการจำนำข้าว มีความพึงพอใจในชีวิตในภาพรวมระดับปานกลางถึงระดับค่อนข้างมาก ร้อยละ 96.5 โดยมีความพึงพอใจในมิติด้านครอบครัว ความสุขในชีวิต มาตรฐานการดำเนินชีวิต และความพึงพอใจด้านสิ่งแวดล้อม และความพึงพอใจในการพักผ่อนหย่อนใจ ตามลำดับ และปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อคุณภาพชีวิตเกษตรกรภายใต้โครงการจำนำข้าว คือ รายได้ ครอบครัว มาตรฐานการดำเนินชีวิต และความพึงพอใจต่อโครงการจำนำข้าว

คำสำคัญ: ความพึงพอใจในชีวิต เกษตรกรภายใต้โครงการจำนำข้าว คุณภาพชีวิต

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Introduction

The Thai government has continually focused on solving the problems of farmers in the country since 1955. No matter who is the government, the measures to tackle the problems of farmers such as the rice price guarantee scheme, rice support policy, rice storage program, and rice pledging scheme, have been determined and tailored on a yearly basis. The government has used those measures as a key mechanism for enhancing rice production, farmer's income, and better quality of life. Unfortunately, the result turns out to be the opposite of what is expected. Thai farmers end up in deeper debt and have to deal with formal and informal creditors. Thus, in order to solve the debt issue, the further measure to provide the farmers with short-term loan and flexible repayment schedule is determined.

In 2010-2013, the government spent an enormous amount of budget to carry out the rice pledging scheme. As a result, the rice production area was found to increase across the country and there were many new farmers joining the scheme. The rice yield was also significantly increased. According to Thailand's Agricultural Census 2013, the majority of the agricultural land was used to grow rice (51.3%), followed by field crops (22.3%), rubber trees (14.6%), plants and trees (8.5), vegetables (0.8), and fodder crops for animal feed (2.5%). The total agricultural land in 2013 was estimated at 72.8 million rais, which was 5.4 million rais higher than in 1993. However, the number of agricultural land holders in 2013 decreased from 4.2 million to 3.8 million. The rice pledging scheme also made the farmers planted more dry-season rice instead of the traditional wet-season rice.

It seems that every government intending to develop the quality of life of the farmers needs to find appropriate solutions to handle these issues. At present, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) pays serious attention to the problems of farmers as well.

Thailand's population structure is closely involved with agriculture in terms of cultural tradition. Thailand is predominantly an agricultural country. Agriculture constantly plays a crucial role in Thailand's economy. Thailand has promoted its food security and positioned itself as the kitchen of the world. According to the rice export statistics, Thai rice has been exported to more than 205 countries worldwide. Thailand's rice export value

in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 (January–July) was recorded at 142,976.24 million baht, 133,851.21 million baht, 174,852 million baht, and 83,752.57 million baht respectively, which was approximately 8% of GDP (source: Center for Information Technology and Communication, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce: 2015). The top three countries importing rice from Thailand were Nigeria, Benin, and the U.S.A. In 2014, the rice export to China had also increased, as shown in Diagram 1.

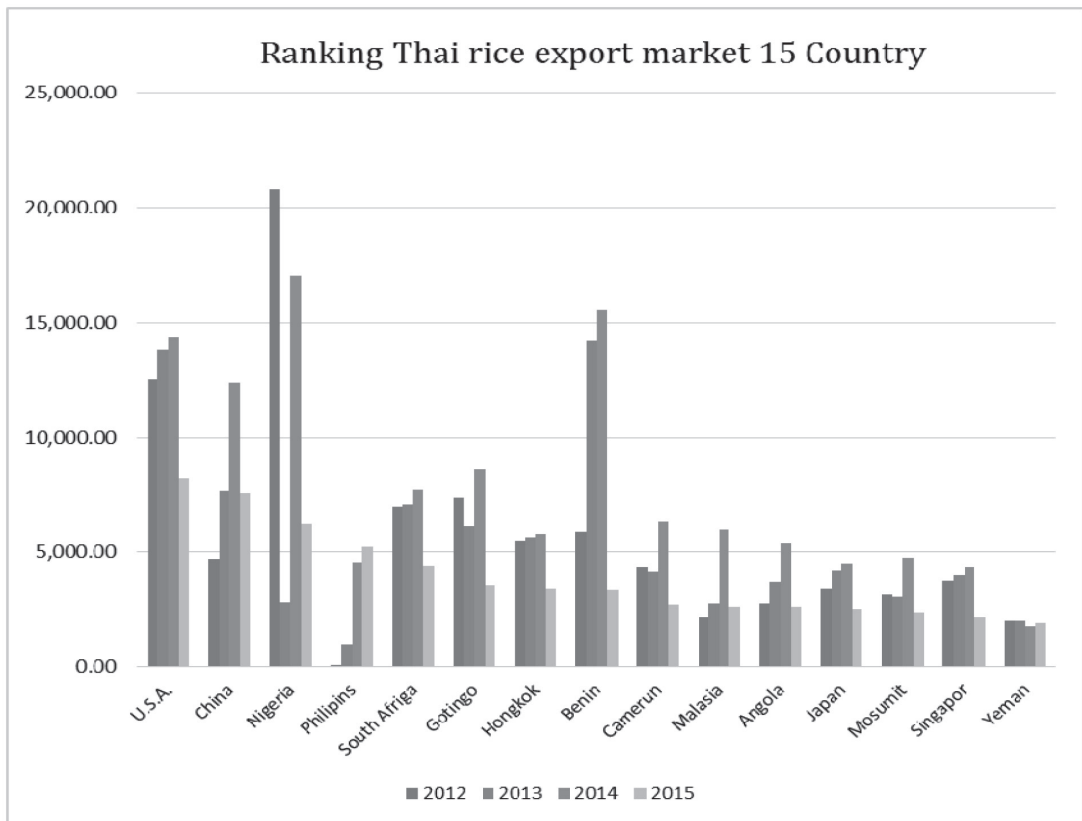


Diagram 1: Thai Rice Export Market 2011-2015

Source: Center for Information Technology and Communication, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, by means of Customs Cooperation, (January-July 2015), from website, http://www.ops3.moc.go.th/infor/MenuComTH/stru1_export/export_topn_re/report.asp.

The government has established the mission to develop the good quality of life and better income for the farmers and provide the people with food safety. The key target is to increase the well-being of farmers to 80% within 2016, boost the economic and agricultural growth by 3%, and develop the agricultural resources appropriate and sufficient for the increasing agricultural production.

Hence, the researcher was interested to study the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme, the problems and obstacles in rice farming, and the farmers' satisfaction towards the rice pledging scheme. The results could be extended to further studies and helpful in developing sustainability for the farmers.

Objectives

- 1) To study the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in Thailand's rice pledging scheme.
- 2) To investigate the factors affecting the farmers' life satisfaction.

Literature Review

Quality of life is one of the key philosophies in public administration, which refers to a measure of the ultimate outcome of the development. St. Thomas Aquinas (A.D.1227-1274), the great philosopher of public administration whose ideas were influenced by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), proposed a public administration approach focusing on the welfare state that could raise the quality of life of the people. Jean Bodin (A.D. 1530-1596), the French philosopher, also suggested a public administration approach emphasizing the outcome development that contributed to physical and mental happiness of the people. Moreover, Jean Jacques Rousseau (A.D. 1712-1778) proposed an important public administration approach focusing on freedom and elimination of social inequality. Therefore, it could be said that the main objective of public administration was to enhance the quality of life, happiness, freedom and equality of the people (Woradej Chansorn, 2009).

Many international academics, development administrators, public administrators, and sociologists, and economists mainly used the social equality theory, economic theory, and human development approach to develop the quality of life of the people

and applied the poverty measurement technique to evaluate the outcome of the development. Amartya Sen (1999) suggested that the poverty measurement alone could not explain the outcome of the development. This was consistent with Martin Seligman (2002), Lyubomirsky Sonja (2005) and Daniel Kahneman & Alan Kureger (2006), who believed that better accommodation and individual values including self-esteem and optimism were the factors affecting the quality of life and happiness of the people (Martin Seligman 2011).

Frisch, Cornell Villanueva & Retzlaff (1992) developed the Quality of Life Inventory to evaluate the total satisfaction of the people by measuring the degree to which their most important needs, goals and wishes had been fulfilled.

$$\text{Total Satisfaction} = \frac{\text{Total of the components} \times \text{weight}}{\text{Total of weighted scores}}$$

The 16 items representing overall life satisfaction which were evaluated included 1) health, 2) self-esteem, 3) goal and value, 4) money, 5) work, 6) play, 7) learning, 8) creativity, 9) helping, 10) love, 11) friend, 12) children, 13) relative, 14) home, 15) neighborhood and 16) community.

Concept of Happiness and Quality of Life

Quality of Life means to feel good and to have what is needed to cope with one's life in the best way possible. The components of quality of life including health, work, profession, family and environment can be evaluated in a holistic and integrated way at a specific period of time.

Happiness means a mental and physical state of well-being of each individual. The internal and external factors of happiness can be assessed in the dimensions of health, work and family.

Quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme refers to the life satisfaction levels of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme.

Quality of life in work dimension refers to the satisfaction towards work and career environment including career security, income and career perception and attitude of each individual at a specific time.

Quality of life in health dimension refers to the satisfaction towards physical and mental health and being free of sickness causing difficulties in daily life.

Quality of life in family dimension refers to the satisfaction towards the family, relationship, compassion, warmth, supportiveness, encouragement, communication and spending time with family members.

Quality of life in leisure and recreation refers to free time for leisure and recreation that can be evaluated at a specific period of time.

Quality of life in standard of living dimension refers to the satisfaction towards public service in terms of news and information accessibility, which is beneficial to daily living, career, education, transportation, public health, public utility, life and property security, economy and community.

Research Methodology

In this study, the quantitative field survey was used to collect data related to the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme. The total satisfaction was evaluated in dimensions of health, family, standard of living, work, environment, leisure and recreation and happiness. The attitude of the farmers toward the rice pledging scheme as well as the risks of rice farming affecting the quality of life of the farmers was also examined.

The multi-stage sampling technique was applied to draw the samples. The simple random sampling was used to select 8 major agricultural provinces from 4 regions, which included 1) the northern region (Chiang Mai and Phitsanulok), 2) the eastern region (Ayutthaya and Nakhon Nayok), 3) the northeastern region (Ubon Ratchathani and Surin), and 4) the southern region (Songkla and Nakhon Si Thammarat). The total sample size of 2,115 farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme was consequently determined.

Considering data analysis, the descriptive statistics and partial correlation was analyzed with multiple regression analysis in order to find the factors affecting the life satisfaction of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme.

In order to study the factors affecting the life satisfaction of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme, the following hypotheses were identified.

Hypothesis 1: Economic factors have an effect on the life satisfaction of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme.

Hypothesis 2: Social factors have an effect on the life satisfaction of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme.

Research Instruments

The research instrument in this study was questionnaires. The rating scale with 10 possible response ranged from “lowest satisfaction” (1 point) to “highest satisfaction” (10 points) was developed to examine the total satisfaction of each farmer in 7 dimensions, which were 1) health, 2) family, 3) standard of daily living, 4) career, 5) environment, 6) leisure and recreation and 7) happiness.

Quality of Life Measurement Scale for the Farmers Enrolling in the Rice Pledging Scheme

This scale was designed to measure the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme in dimensions of health, family, standard of daily living, career, environment, leisure and recreation and happiness. In order to assess the farmers' attitude and satisfaction towards the rice pledging scheme, the sum and mean score of each dimension were calculated and classified into the following three categories.

Score	Meaning
1.00-2.88	lowest satisfaction
2.89-3.50	moderate satisfaction
3.51-4.00	highest satisfaction

Regarding the assessment of the effects of the rice pledging scheme on the quality of life and the attitude towards the risks, needs and wishes of the farmers, the following questions were developed to collect the data.

1. What is your comment on the rice pledging scheme?
2. Do you have any risk effect in your rice farming? How?
3. Does the rice pledging scheme make your quality of life better? How?
4. What will be the future of your rice farming?
5. What are your lifetime needs and wishes?

Research Results

The results revealed that 96.5% of the samples had a moderate to relatively high level of satisfaction. The satisfaction scores of the dimensions of family, health, and leisure and recreation were 3.10, 3.03 and 2.99 respectively, which were higher than those of the dimensions of environment and career. The details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Satisfaction Levels of the Farmers Classified into 7 Dimensions

Dimension	Satisfaction Levels				Total (%)	(n)	Mean	S.D.
	High	Relative High	Moderate	Low				
Health	25.1	48.6	8.31	0.6	100	(2,113)	3.03	1.435
Family	28.2	54.1	17.4	0.3	100	(2,113)	3.10	0.678
Standard of daily living	13.0	60.3	26.4	0.3	100	(1,991)	2.86	0.621
Career	16.9	56.0	26.6	0.5	100	(2,005)	2.86	0.666
Environment	19.6	56.4	23.3	0.7	100	(1,683)	2.94	0.675
Leisure & recreation	18.3	60.2	21.0	0.2	100	(1,670)	2.99	0.742
Happiness	17.4	60.8	21.5	0.3	100	(2,022)	2.95	0.633

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to find the relationship between the variables. The results suggested that the total satisfaction had a relationship with the quality of life in standard of daily living dimension. The below equation showed that the relationship between the quality of life in standard of daily living dimension and the total satisfaction accounted for 33.6% (R-square = 0.336).

$$\text{Total satisfaction} = (-1.101) + 0.638 (\text{Quality of life in daily life dimension})$$

Therefore, it could be said that the total satisfaction of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme had a positive relationship with the quality of life in standard of daily living dimension. The indicators of the relationship consisted of the following:

News and information accessibility

- 1) Politics and society
- 2) Career
- 3) Weather forecast
- 4) Self-development

Public service accessibility

- 5) Public health services
- 6) Total integrated services
- 7) Public transportation
- 8) Quality of the services
- 9) Communication
- 10) Educational opportunities for minors
- 11) Convenient accessibility to daily consumer services and 4 basic human needs
- 12) Life and property security
- 13) Natural disaster security
- 14) Government stability and security

Satisfaction towards the Rice Pledging Scheme

The samples had high satisfaction towards the rice pledging scheme with an average score of 8.38. When asked the question "Do you think the government should continue proceeding the rice pledging scheme?", 94.3% of the samples answered, "Yes" while 4.5% of them answered "No". This was probably because the farmer's income tended to increase after enrolling in the rice pledging scheme and most of the samples were found to be concerned about rice production and selling price.

Risks in Rice Farming Career

The findings indicated that the risks in rice farming career were associated with the rice market mechanism, production cost, selling price and natural disasters such as drought and flood. In addition, the risks in rice farming could result from the chemical hazards. It was found that 5.4% of the farmers in the northern region got sick from chemical exposure, which was higher than the number of affected farmers in other regions.

Effect of the Rice Pledging Scheme on the Quality of Life of the Farmers

The research results showed that the rice pledging scheme had a positive effect on the quality of life of the farmers in an economic aspect. The rice pledging scheme enabled the farmers to receive higher income and be able to pay back loan. It was found that 4.8% of the samples were able to improve their rice production factors, including a local farm land expansion, farm machinery and tractors. Moreover, they could make savings for the future consumption and investment. In case of no longer any support scheme and poor rice production due to water resource issue, the savings would be a last resort to continue their daily life. However, the farmers could reduce the impact of those unfavorable situations by trying other agricultural options such as vegetable and livestock farming.

Conclusion

The study of the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme could be concluded as follows:

1. The farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme were satisfied with their life.
2. The factors affecting the life satisfaction of the samples were income, family, health, daily life standard in terms of economy and society. Moreover news and information accessibility, especially information about the rice pledging scheme.

The hypotheses were proved to be true, as the economic factors were found to have an effect on the rice pledging scheme and the family, health and daily life standard also significantly affected the life satisfaction of the farmers.

Discussion and Suggestion

The results of this present study suggested that the factors, which had the most impact on the life satisfaction of the farmers were income, followed by family, health, and standard of daily living, which varied according to different regions and contexts. This was consistent with Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva & Retzlaff (1992), who stated that health, money, and income were the factors needed to develop the quality of life of the farmers.

Moreover, the indicator of life satisfaction on the well-being at the individual level was measured by using the objective indicators and subjective indicators. This consists of the multiple dimensions, such as family, health, work and environment (Easterlin and Angelescu: 2013, 6) in order to reflect the overall satisfaction and happiness. The result of the research showed the variables and factors which affected the quality of life Thai farmers were the economic indicator, as such, monthly income and loan obligation.

The rice pledging scheme was one of the government policies to resolve the issue by helping farmers in term of short-term direct earning. The systematic approach should be considered for the longer term solution, by analyzing the factors related to the income and expense, such as family structures with members with compulsory education, extra earning while waiting for harvesting, expense prioritization, income insecurity due to the uncontrollable production cost and the market price of rice. Farmers totally understood that government rice pledging scheme needed much budget. Farmers merely needed to earn enough to get by. The price of rice under the rice pledging scheme of 9,000-10,000 bath per 1,000 kilograms, were enough for their cost of living.

Quality of life in family dimension was the important factor farmer happiness. The rice pledging scheme helped reducing the issues in family matters and raising family value. The graduation of their children was also the indicator of their happiness.

The satisfaction of quality of life in health dimension of farmers under the rice pledging scheme was relatively high. Since farmers think of their work as the opportunity to constantly exercise and be close to the nature. Sickness was related to sex, age and education. The most concerns were family, finance, work, high expense, low income. Currently, the law on famer welfare would offer some cover regarding the health concerns. One important thing in the standard of dairy life, was the news accessibility. Understanding the rice price was determined, helped farmers prepared themselves in annual cycle.

The results of this study of the quality of life presented the life satisfaction from the well-being at individual level, by using the objective indicators and subjective indicators, embraces the multiple components, directly about people's satisfaction with life or happiness are commonly factors to inform development policy and practice, hopefully for leading to development Laura Camfield (K.C Land: 2012, 399-402) Veenhoven Ruut (K.C. Land: 2012, 63-77).

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

1. Recommendation for Further Research:

Future studies should focus on examining 14 indicators, which were found in this research, in order to find a systematic approach to enhance the quality of life of the farmers enrolling in the rice pledging scheme.

2. Recommendation for Policy Development:

2.1 In order to develop the better quality of life of the farmers, the government should emphasize development in the following areas:

- Daily life standard
- Local mechanism to support the development in all related field, especially news and information accessibility that could promote the standard of living and career of the farmers.
- Educational measure to encourage further study
- Healthcare measure
- Agricultural measure to support rice and other related crops farming

2.2 The management and administration relevant to the quality of life of the farmers should be carried out according to the context of each region.

2.3 The government should focus on enhancing the quality of life in dimension of mental happiness related to the family, environment, nature and positive self and social perception at individual level.

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