

The Enhancement of Production and Sales Capacity of Community Enterprises in Thailand

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Abstract

This article presented the role of community enterprises in the progression of their respective community economies. Upon examination of alternative markets for Thai community enterprises, and with the state of problems they encountered being situated in central parts of Thailand, it has been revealed that the community enterprises were proven as economical and social organizations that were driven by their own populations. The community enterprises union has become more effective in terms of finance, investment, production, marketing, administration, leadership, labor, generalization of rules and regulations, and inter-relationships with external communities. However, from operational results considered from the case study of community enterprises in the central parts of Thailand, there was only 43.79 percent of the total number of 256 community enterprises in 22 provinces proven efficient. These community enterprises had their production order only 21.29 percent caused by the competitiveness of the mainstream economy. With stronger management, including better marketing mechanisms, alternative marketing is as old choice for community products because they offer 'fair trade' idealism and best practices. In contrast, the mainstream marketing focuses on 'free trade' and more on 'profits' rather than the fair relationship between producers and consumers.

Statement and significance of the problem

A community enterprise is an organization established to support communal economies for its production, food processing, sales, and services based on knowledge of local wisdom integrated with components of contemporary business knowledge. In principle, the government has to support activities of the community enterprises in order that the community economy is driven together with the industrial economy. Therefore, a factor affecting the community enterprises' success is good management practices comprised of several components e.g., seeking funding for investment; managing production including sales, marketing, customer service; administration of finance and work systems; and personnel including workforce management, a support of the members' participation, external interactions, and leadership ability of the managers. These components need to be shaped and integrated in harmony to form an appropriate organizational culture.

Srisang (2002) investigated the situation from a study report by Secretariat Office of Community Enterprise Promotion Board (2011). It was found that the work of community enterprises is not successful as expected because there were only 29.73 percent of them which were proven efficient. The major problems they had included a determination of organizational directions, designing an operational plan, marketing management, knowledge and

information management, human resource management, management of products and services and results of the community enterprises management. The problems, at the same time, reflect such limitation of good management carried out by the community enterprises. According to the study by Sutthinarakorn (2012), the focus was on product sales and marketing of the community enterprises themselves which directed much on mainstream market. It was regarded as a market for industrial system competing with production costs and lower prices. However, goods produced by the community enterprises naturally had a high production cost as most were handmade products which could be produced less in quantity compared with those produced in the industrial system. Farmers faced a difficult situation as they had a high cost in production but were reluctant to sell their products at a competitive price or even lower than those produced by machine in industry cycle. The community enterprises were supposed to look for an alternative market which allows an easy access between the producers and their consumers. In addition, it helps to reduce the gap between them which has long been taken place by the middle men or merchants in selling process. It is the market aimed to sell safety products while the buyers are pleased with fair prices. Based on the fair trade principle, it greatly differs from the mainstream market which is always bound with competition in the free trade phenomena. Sutthinarakorn (2012) also suggested that the mainstream market is suitable for sufficient community enterprises only, whereas for the insufficient ones, or those in a position to compete in the mainstream market, the intent of this article is to present roles of enterprises leading their respective economies forward across economically problematic situations in order to enter the new, alternative market.

Community enterprises and enhancement of community economy

A community enterprise refers to the community's business in which it is involved with the thinking process, yield management, and management of resources in a form of product processing by their respective families, organizations, or community networks with the purpose of generating income for the community at large. Throughout this process, it promotes fairness between producers and consumers, but most importantly, it is an application of local wisdom practically applied to develop the community economy and create a learning process within said community for self-sustainability and prosperity. Thus, the community acts its ownership in the process including production and selling activities. It allows them to integrate their local wisdom in such process which can later create a new innovation in the practice of production and service. There will be a systematic link in all activities concerned when learning process has taken place. As a result, the community becomes self-reliant (Nanthasuwan, 2001). Therefore, the development of community enterprises is to promote a sustainable economy for the present and future in a balance between the two economic systems: one of the community's and another of the industry. There are nine factors affecting success or failure of the community enterprises as pointed out by Srisang (2002) as follows:

1. Factor of finance or capital

Business and marketing activities always first begins with investment in production and trading to, in return, generate incomes. There are three sources of capital for business: self collection money, loan money, and money raised by community members. If the community uses the money which is raised by themselves, the enterprise is given more of a chance for growth than loans.

2. Factor of marketing

In estimating demand and supply, the community enterprises have to know well about market for their products and how to sell them. The successful community enterprises will always have their marketing partners that mean the suppliers who are able to order their products in bulk. On the other hand, retailing sales has different buyers who are quite uncertain. For the community groups that have a certain market, they will able to become self-reliant community enterprises growing with their business expansion. Hence, the marketing factor is an indicator of their success or failure.

3. Factor of production

In production process, both demand and supply in the market need to be analyzed. Expertise of the producers is one factor which is as important as market opportunity. When the cost of production is low together with the skillfulness of producers, it produces quality products which are competitive in the market. A successful production must be compatible with marketing opportunity and products of the market needs.

4. Factor of administration and management

For this factor, it includes 3 important aspects: money system, work system and personnel system. In the money system, it covers the capability of raising money for investment which is necessary. Next, when the money is there, the administration of the cash flow is also equally important. Either money is not well spent or the administration is inefficient is misleading to disaster. In the work system, the successful community enterprises enable to form good administration structure divided into small divisions

taking care of and controlling different tasks assigned. For the personnel system, it is not much clear in many community enterprises in terms of channel of command because of small number of employees they have. Most of them are members and committee in administration board themselves. There is no command, order, merit, or punishment systems. The success of community enterprises seen from personnel aspect depends upon loyalty, morality as well as sacrifice of their managers and members.

5. Factor of leader

Most of rural people encounter a problem about having a leader. The natural leaders they have always come up with their career success. For those being respected, knowledgeable, and wealthy, they can be relied on by people in the society. Reflecting from the situation in the community enterprises founded by those who were successful in their career, raise for money was done easily. So the business grew rapidly with stability and high opportunity of success.

6. Factor of labor

Most of the community enterprises have a few employees. Rather, they are self-employed for a family business. Many of their employees are not knowledgeable, nor do they have proper skill or experience about the job. Young generation migrates to work in the city. Workforce employed for the community enterprises mainly consists of elderly people.

7. Factor of participation

Cycle of the community enterprises business involves participation of their members at all steps. Sustainable growth of the community enterprises depends on such participation which allows them to think together, getting involved in decision making,

especially planning about fund raised for their investment. Therefore, the participation to raise fund for investment, in this context, simply means that they have participated in holding shares of their business together and manage it to achieve the goal set.

8. Factor of rules and regulations

Rules and regulations are important for everybody in the organization to follow and carry out their tasks properly to reach the goal successfully. Because the mission of the community enterprises is based on mutual agreement, rules and regulations are viewed as a commitment from their members to direct their organization towards a desirable path.

9. Factor of external relationship

External relationships in this regard simply refer to the interaction of groups of people or individuals concerned with the business of community enterprises. Generally, there are four groups of people that they are always associated with: the interaction between government or its sectors, non-government organizations, educators or educational institutes, and business sectors. The community enterprises have to learn and perform themselves properly when interacting with external bodies.

According to Srisang (2002) community enterprise markets, and markets for the community products, can be categorized into three types, the first of which is the market for products used in households and around the community. Products in this market can also be distributed to people of a different community which networks in their district. Second, is the market selling products for people across districts, and it also promotes exchanging products between provinces. Third, is the market for premium products which can be sold to bigger markets, so it requires

good quality products and specific identity products. For an institute of Community Enterprise Promotion, there are three characteristics of markets for the community products: 1) Local markets include markets in the village, between villages and networks of people. These types of markets are always known as 'sufficient markets'; 2) General markets, called consumer markets, are for consumer goods; 3) Relative markets are formed by cooperation of many parties involved such as organizations, institutes, associations, and people who support the community enterprises. They agreed to buy products from a community, a district, or a network each year at a certain volume. The relative markets, therefore, are based on the understanding concerning the community enterprises which can be later generated as policy and operational plans for their partners wishing to sell their products. Sukkamnerd and Sukkamnerd (1999) suggested marketing strategies as follows:

1. Being a leader in investment is a very important strategy, one of popular strategies in Thailand, in order to expand wider markets. In principle, it believes in response towards products need of the customer. They will return to buy such products again when the prices are lower than other competitors.

2. Creating value added to products makes them different from those of competitors. Especially, for the products or service needed by the customers, guidelines might be as follows:

3. Develop product quality to meet the standard, focusing on safety and nutrition value. Design them to be user-friendly and easy to keep such as convenient package, quantity loaded suitable with customer's need and specific identity of the package including flavor, color, pattern and consistent quality.

4. Add variation to the products, creating differences to the products using the same material e.g., weaving suitcase from Water Hyacinth, a free-floating perennial plant easily found in small pond or canal. The material can also be applied to create different items such as lantern, basket, vase etc. With this technique, it can create a product variation with systematic link from one product to another using the same material. It offers choices for the customer to choose to use a particular product which can go along with the same type of brand or material. In addition, the products will be value added and identity of them is automatically created. Then upgrade service standard to be more competitive, adding quality and fast service to it including other relevant factors affecting value added to the products. To increase value in the products, however, the community enterprises need to be aware of their customers, competitors, selling techniques, marketing channel in the future, technology, production, quality control, farmer network, link to business and production cost. Therefore, a successful community enterprise always starts from one business until they are successful, then continue to expand to other businesses.

In the past years, the government has supported Secretariat Office of Community Enterprise Promotion Board (2011) as follows:

1. It developed the appropriate technology, offering opportunity for the community enterprises to participate in the development process. This was to develop the technology in response to economic, social and cultural contexts including skills of their members. At the same time, the members became aware of the importance of technology and understanding of technology development solutions for further application.

2. It developed marketing information and marketing research.

3. It developed a marketing channel which became one among several problems found in the community enterprises in Thailand. This obstacle prevented chances of the community enterprises in expanding their markets, and reduced their negotiation power.

The community enterprises will achieve their goal if getting support from both government and private sectors under the following principles (Nanthasuwan, 2001):

4. Decentralization

It means that giving an authority to the bottom line of management or community organization to make decision on their own activities more freely and widely. Decentralization helps to encourage them to start creativity and manage the local resources more effectively for sustainability of their community enterprises.

5. People participation

It refers to the process in which local people are encouraged to take part in developing, especially their quality of life based on facts and their need as such. With this strategy, it can strengthen the community enterprises status sustainably.

6. Civil Social

This notion has emerged when social problems become more complex. The problems cannot be resolved by the single party. As a result, people realize about being together, work and solve the problem together.

However, all of this support has not been made successful since the community enterprises still

have a limitation in their production, selling, marketing and administration processes.

Alternative markets for the community enterprises

Primary problems of agriculture section in Thailand

Since Thailand has been using its first economic development plan in 1961, the government supported monoculture system in order to promote production power for free trade system. Thus, the free trade system has long been developed for more than 50 years. However, the problems about production of the farmers still exist. The reason is that the farmers lack proper knowledge and technology assistance for their production. They are use to using chemical fertilizers in farming incorrectly while having difficult situation in marketing, but in fact, they lack proper knowledge of marketing techniques. Among many problems investigated, they also have less power in negotiation on pricing their own products (Sutthinarakorn, 2007).

In 1984, non-governmental organizations suggested the notion of alternative market, focusing on production of variety of products and safety. Later on the government included the notion of sustainable agriculture in the seventh national economic and social development plan. In the plan, there are 5 models of sustainable agriculture: natural agriculture, integrated agriculture, bio-agriculture, forestry agriculture and new theory of agriculture. Six hundred and thirty-three million baht was set as budget to promote sustainable agriculture in the areas of 25 million rai (equivalent to 9.8 million acres / covering 25 percent of all agricultural areas). This notion is regarded as initiation of the alternative agriculture. An attempt to enhance production

process in accordance with alternative agriculture has been put forward since then. Nowadays, the government has followed the philosophy of a sufficiency economy as a guideline in developing its own country. In actual practice of alternative economies, however, there are still some restrictions to it. Some of those are misunderstanding of its principles among the officials and the famers themselves affected by mainstream agriculture.

Mainstream marketing versus alternative marketing: implications of differences

Mainstream marketing is a practice of selling and buying in response people's need towards unlimited quantity of products available in the free trade system. The concept of marketing focuses on profitability while people or buyers want good quality products with lower prices. Both sides so wish to fill their satisfaction as much as possible that the competition in the market is getting higher and higher. Advertisements have greatly influenced on people's behavior in buying and selling consumer goods or other products (Wiangsang, 2008).

Alternative marketing begins with a concept which is different from mainstream marketing. It aims at 'fair trade' while the mainstream one focuses on 'free trade'. Boonrahong (2012) explained that it relates to agricultural production which is well managed, safe for consumers and has a fair relationship between producers and consumers to create stability in terms of food, economy, society, culture and environment. It is comprised of the following principles:

1. A production must come first and leads marketing which is in opposite of one in the mainstream market. Therefore, in alternative marketing is giving a first priority of its products to consumers in the

community and then expand to other community nearby, next, to further community respectively.

2. In the production process, the chemical fertilizer is not always used. Anti-insect chemical is sometimes use when necessary together with natural protection. Whenever the products are being processed or there is a marketing activity taken place, the employment of labor force must be fair.

3. In marketing activity, buying and selling products, it is aimed at creating a good relationship and promoting fairness between buyers and sellers. Also, it cultivates good feeling to each other, having good service, safety food production which is environmental friendly and fair prices.

4. In packaging process, the focus is on using economical and clean materials which can be found locally and naturally. The quality of products is more important than packaging.

5. In alternative marketing concept, farmers are allowed to have their own shop and participate in marketing management process which is totally different with the concept of mainstream marketing. Besides, the alternative marketing outlet does not need to be big to spend unnecessary investment causing in a high production

Benefits of alternative marketing

The following are respective benefits of alternative marketing:

1. It helps to create supportive and friendly society, particularly a good relationship between farmers and consumers. This is because it serves as

direct sales from the farmers to their customers (Kelly, 1995).

2. It opens an opportunity for the farmers to get information from external communities. This will not only create an experience of updating themselves but also offering chances in marketing and learning of marketing management to adapt for their own organization (Rubin and Rubin, 2001).

3. It encourages exchanging of learning between the farmers and consumers when dealing with the state of production, problems and facts about it. This will help the consumers in adapting their consuming behavior in order that it is adaptable to seasonal production. Indirectly, it is beneficial to eco system and multi agriculture still exists (Rubin and Rubin, 2001: 95).

4. It promotes groups or network of farmers because they are given priority in alternative marketing management. Based on its principle, the management is always formed by group of people for a strong organizational structure (Brown *et al.*, Jiggins and Roling, 1998).

5. It generates stable incomes for the farmers because they are able to plan their production, agree on suitable prices based on seasonal products. Most importantly, they can generate incomes from a wide variety of products all year round and are able to manage their expenses in their family.

6. It offers fair prices to consumers and the stability for food which everybody is given access to safety food regardless classes of people.

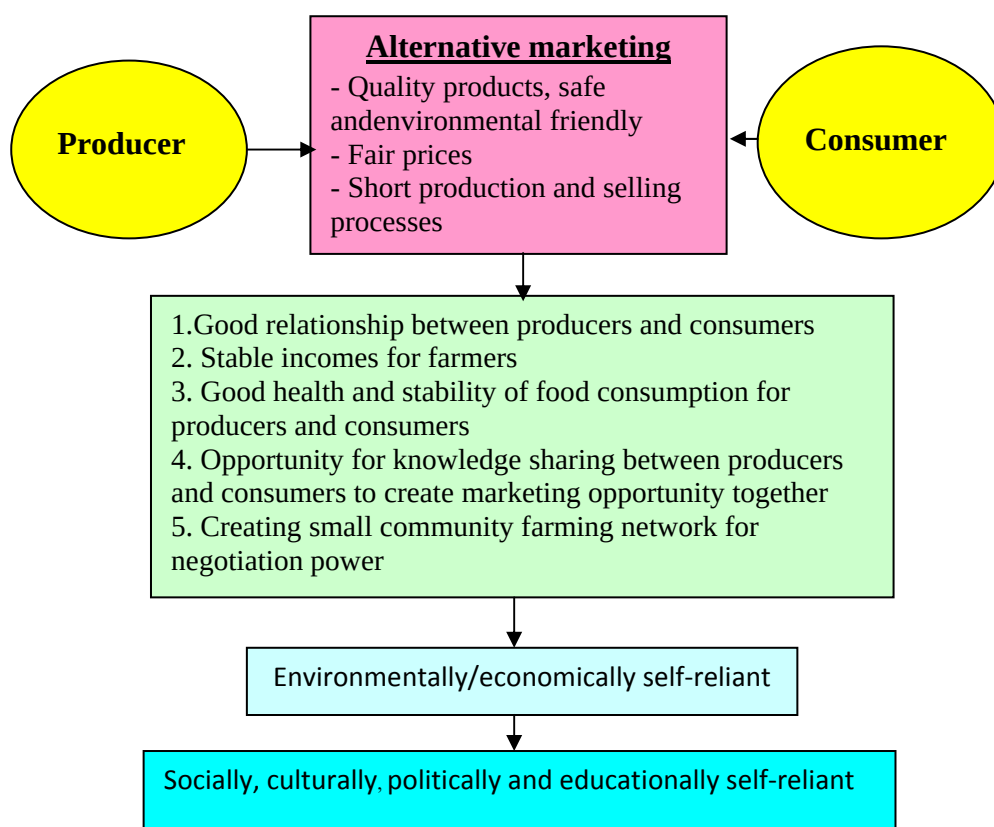


Figure 1 Relationship between producers and consumers in alternative marketing

7. It has a safe production process which effectively reduces chemical hazards contaminated. Consumers are guaranteed of having safety food which is good for their health.

8. It uses natural materials for packaging which is environmental friendly.

9. It makes farmers become more self-reliant economically, resulting in the stability in social, cultural, political and educational aspects as a whole (Dick, 1997).

Models of alternative markets

International alternative market models

There are six patterns of the international alternative market models in a study by Boonrahong, (2000). They are categorized as follows:

1. Direct market: It is the traditional marketing which Japanese farmers viewed it as free trade market which producers lost their advantages. They invented direct market by first investigating the consumers' need. In the production process, the consumers needed to pay deposit and got their products delivered at their resident in the city on due date agreed.

2. Teke market: It is another type of marketing when Japanese people gathered as group inquiring for the consumers' need in the city. In the same practice, the consumers also formed a group to support products from the producers. They arranged a meeting to plan for their production and solve the problems together, visiting each other, exchanging their products, agreeing on prices and delivery date.

3. Consumers helps producers. This type of market first happened in Europe and America when a group of consumers gathered to help farmers' products. It was a market where the two parties proposed problems about factors in their production and the expenses of producers which needed to get paid in advance by consumers for the first half of total

payment cost for goods. Actually, it was a mutual agreement in planning together when there was an abundant supply of products, the consumers deceived it. On contrary, when there was a natural disaster affecting the production, the consumers got it less too.

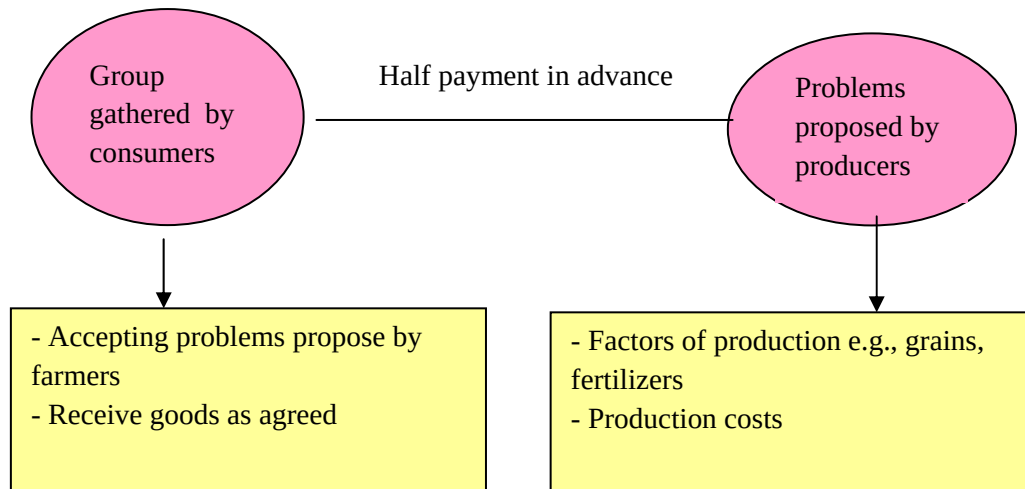


Figure 2 Relationship between producers and consumers in the market of consumer groups helping their farmers

Models of alternative markets in Thailand

Wiangsang (2008) explained the models of alternative markets in Thailand as follows:

1. Market in park (farm): It is a market where products are sold in the park. The consumers are able to walk in the park and buy things they want from it. It also serves as the community food source where they can go for a variety of vegetables sold.

2. Market in village: It serves as a place where people in the community can buy their own

essentials without depending on external products. It can be either placed at a certain or uncertain place in the village. Rather it can be opened to sell their goods in front of their house instead.

3. Market of collective products: It is the market which sells both fresh products and processed food products. However, this kind of market is not very popular because the products produced are not made to meet the customer's demand while the consumers need a variety of products.



Pictures taken in the weekend market

4. Market in school: It can be placed either in school, hospital or any other places which belong to both government and private sectors. Vegetables and safety food are usually sold at this type of market with fair prices.

5. Fresh market in city: It is the market where sellers get direct products from producers and sell them to consumers.

6. Weekend market: It is the market where producers get their products and make direct sales to their consumers. This type of market is very popular since it responds to customers' need. Another, the meeting between the producers and consumers creates good relationship. The prices are fair, and there are

choices of products. People can form a group needing to sell their products in the market. Like Green Markets in Surin Province, in Songkla Province and in Meahongsong Province, Thailand, farmers collect their products including vegetables to sell in it.

7. Retailing market: It is the market which sells chemical-free agricultural products produced by the farmers in a big amount. Then, they are delivered to a central market which takes all products sent. At the same time, consumers know the exact place receiving the products and buy from it. The products get a brand stamped on which can be more reliable for consumers

Mainstream market	Alternative market
<u>Productivity</u> 1.It is for production from mainstream market which focuses on mono agriculture.	1.It is for production produced in alternative market which focuses on multi agriculture.
2.Chemical substances and fertilizers are used to enhance production.	2. Avoid using chemicals. Any bio or natural fertilizers are used instead to reduce unnecessary expenses.
<u>Relation to production</u> 1.It controls nature and environment.	1.It goes together with nature and environment.
<u>Sales</u> 1.It sells to mainstream markets.	1.It sells in alternative markets.
2.It has to get through a middle person in selling process.	2.It has a short selling process where encouraging the producers and consumers to meet directly.
3.In management, job is assigned to each individual.	3.Create opportunity where people can get information from producers, exchanging, learning together between them.
<u>Relationship between producers and consumers</u> 1.Profit comes first.	1.Promote relationship and responsibility among them.
2.Competition is made under free trade concept.	2.It focuses on helping each other under fair trade concept.

Table 1 A comparison of guidelines in the two markets

When comparing between mainstream markets and alternative markets, the differences are shown as the table below:

State of problems in the community enterprises in the central parts of Thailand

From the research findings reported by Suthinarakom (2012), there were 256 groups of community enterprises, in central parts of Thailand including 22 provinces, running their business in food processing. It was found that 16 items of their products were awarded OTOP or five-star products. Only 21.29 percent of the products were made to order, and 82.51 percent of those had uncertain sales outlet. With respect to administration, there were only 112 community enterprises ranked efficient. The other 114 cases were at average whereas the rest of 30 were unsatisfied.

Based on the data from an interview with members and all parties involved the community enterprises, the main problem they encountered was the marketing channel. In a real practice, the market they had for their products relied on occasional events held by government sectors. At the same time, they had many competitors as the community enterprises grew increasingly in number. Business owners reflected that there was no variation in the products nor they had different patterns. Most importantly, packaging for the products was not attractive. So it was suggested that the best market for efficient community enterprises was mainstream markets such as department store. However, the average ones were suitable for alternative markets such as markets held at occasional events. Last but not least, markets in the community best suited those proved inefficient including the markets supported

by government sectors. The aim was to enhance the production standard, promoting sales, encouraging learning in group management. Based on the research findings, the writer suggests the following solutions:

1. Solutions towards self development of the community enterprises

1.1 The community enterprises should decide on sales channel for their products. There are three important ways: sales within their community, sales to general consumers and tourists. Selling to these groups of customers will lead to expansion to other outlets and enhance production as well as suitable packaging.

1.2 Mainstream markets are suitable for the community enterprises which are efficient. The government organizations should support and escort those themselves to meet the industrial standard.

1.3 Alternative markets, as mentioned earlier, are for the community enterprises which are at average and unsatisfied levels.

1) For the community enterprises at average level, they should focus on markets in their community or across villages to promote selling for self-reliant economy. The products only need simple packaging with brand stamped and details of basic product information.

2) As for inefficient ones, they should put emphasis on products aimed to sell in their community. They need to be equipped with knowledge of quality production.

1.4 A creative economic market is the outlet where the community enterprises are able to sell their products in higher prices. The buyers are always Thai and foreign tourists who have high purchasing ability. This type of market can be situated abroad,

so the production promotion must be on website. With the creative economic market, the community enterprises can overcome the high production cost they have encountered since they are able to put higher prices on their products. However, there should be a careful consideration on those qualified for this type of market.

1.5 The community enterprises should undertake a research to survey their local customers so as to enhance economy at internal and external levels.

1.6 The community enterprises should coordinate with schools or educational institutions to integrate local wisdom on food product into classroom curriculum. It is beneficial in transmission of the local knowledge to young generation which can be a pride of the community leading to further development based on it.

2. Solutions towards a support from government sectors

2.1 The government sectors should support in organizing events occasionally in response to the community enterprises' need. This will enable them to approach their customers easily. So there should be an effective coordination between the government organizations with private sectors.

2.2 Secretariat Office of Community Enterprise Promotion Board, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative should take a major role in the growth of community enterprises as a whole by the following:

1) Support development and advertisement of creative products made by the community on website in Thai and English.

2) Support basic knowledge of the community's idealism to enhance the community economy.

3) Support to distribute knowledge of the community enterprises management e.g., operational planning, evaluation, role of a leader, accounting, rules and regulation, participation and coordination with internal and external organizations.

4) Support to distribute knowledge of product innovation developed on the local wisdom including enhancement of food safety.

5) Support to distribute knowledge of mainstream market, alternative market and creative market.

6) Support to distribute knowledge of communication technology to promote their products on website so that the consumers are accessible to the information of market source.

In conclusion, a community enterprise is an essential community organization established to enhance the local production activities, such as in food processing from agricultural products, products created from local wisdom, development of marketing system, and local service and welfare programs. The concept, therefore, is based on a self-reliant economy, with inherent development guidelines drawn from such facts that should begin with improving the respective administration system, capital, marketing, leadership, member participation, rules and regulations, relationships with external communities in order to reduce the production cost, and becoming a leader in the market. For a community enterprise to enter a market, they are able to choose either mainstream or alternative markets depending on their idealism and opportunities offered. However, as pointed out, the alternative markets differ from the mainstream markets in terms of production, emphasizing on quality and natural

products which are environmentally friendly. They create a fair trade system, believing that production is more important than marketing, and therefore, in the production and marketing process, there is always a good relationship between producers and consumers. However, in the real world, it is not easy to implement such ideal marketing concept and put it into practice in the battle where almost production and marketing arena are occupied by the mainstream markets.

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