

The Vision that Rural Young People in Prachinburi Province have of Becoming a Farmer

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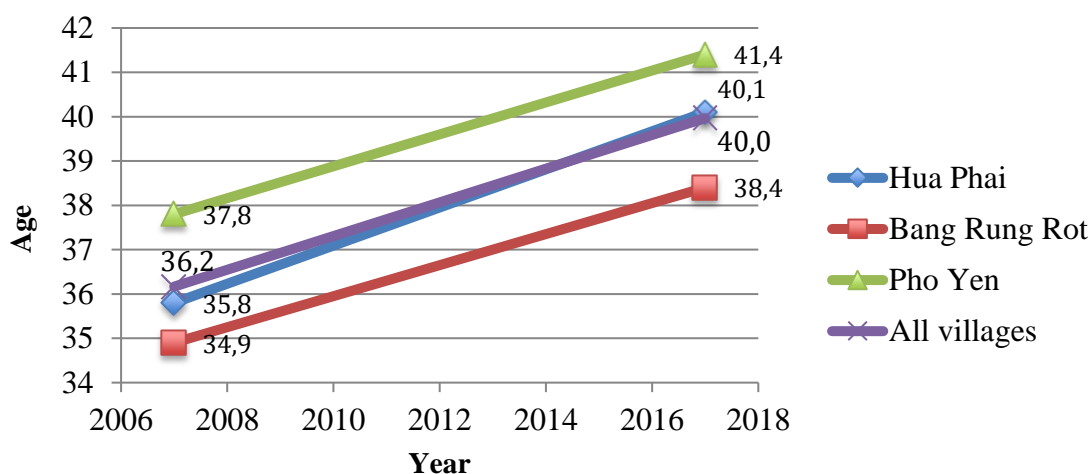
1. Introduction

In Thailand, the lack of involvement of young people in farming is widely seen and acknowledged. One explanation often made for this lack of is that young rural people are not interesting in farming, because of *limited opportunities to get a correct income* and because farming is seen as a *low status and non-prestigious activity*. This study aims to assess this idea, by: 1) analysing the vision that young rural people have of farming and 2) to identify, for those potentially interested in becoming a farmer, the conditions under which these people would be ready to engage in farming.

We interviewed young rural people living in Bang Sang District, Prachinburi Province. We interviewed 86 young people (47 female and 39 male inhabitants) within the age range of 17 and 24 years old (average: 20.2). Among interviewees, 74 were single and 12 were married. 42% of interviewees were children of farmers and 58% were not children of farmers.

26 respondents were from Hua Phai Village, 20 respondents from Pho Yen Village and 40 respondents from Bang Rung Rot Village. Farmers of Hua Phai and Pho Yen are mainly growing rice. The price of rice has been falling in recent years from approximately 8,000 TBH to 6,300 TBH per tonne; hence rice farming on small to medium scale farms is not considered a profitable occupation anymore. In contrast, in Bang Rung Rot farmers are mostly dedicated to fish and shrimp production, therefore farming is still considered a profitable occupation. As Figure 1 shows, inhabitants of all three villages are aging.

Figure 1: Evolution of average age in study villages



Source: Registry Unit, Bang Sang District Office, 2017

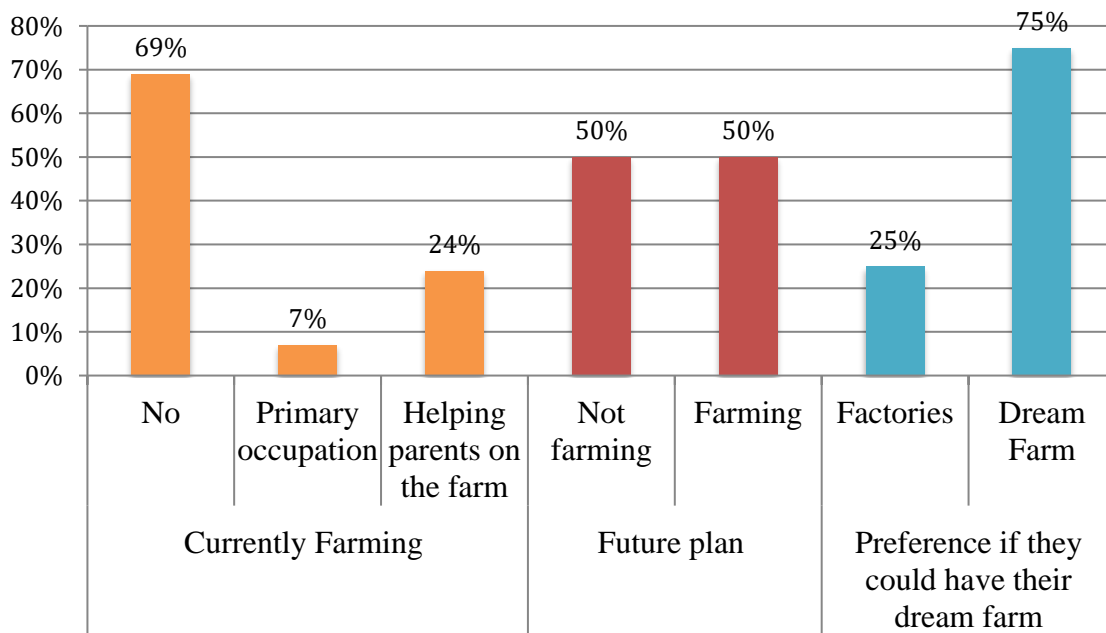
2. Results

Figure 2 compares three elements: 1) young people’s current involvement in farming; 2) their plan to engage in farming in the future; 3) their predisposition to become a farmer if they could have the farm of their dream.

Current involvement in farming

Interviewed *young people are currently not much involved in farming*: only 7% do farming as their main occupation, and 24% do it as a secondary occupation. Two thirds of the latter are living in Bang Rung Rot and help their parents to breed fish and shrimp. In the villages of from Hua Phai and Pho Yen, which are mostly dedicated to rice farming, only 3 young people help their parents. They help their parents on the farm but they do not necessarily get parts of the benefits or do not hold decision-making power. Moreover, none of the respondents chose agriculture or any related discipline as field of study. Two main explanations may be provided: 1) they preferred to study disciplines that would open up them opportunities in the future outside farming; 2) they consider that the knowledge proposed in agricultural colleges is not the one they would need to start farming.

Figure 2: Involvement of young people in farming



Among all respondents, 38% have no farming experience whatsoever and 42% of them are children of farmers (part of the 69% of young people that are currently not engaged in farming had helped their parents in the past). Out of the 86 interviews, 40 young people believe their parents do not want them to become farmers. The parents of the 17 young people who are encouraged to do farming are mainly fish and shrimp farmers (10

respondents), they grow rice plus fish and shrimp (2 respondents) and only 3 are children of rice farmers. The average land size of the parents who encourage their children to do farming is 48 rai. This is above the average land size of the parents of interviews, which is 31.9 rai.

Future plan

Half of the respondents plan to become farmers in the future. Among those who plan to do farming 72% wants to take over their parents farm and 28% who plan to start on their own. Moreover, 58% of those who plan to do farming want to become a fulltime farmer and 42% plan to do it as a secondary occupation.

Those whose parents are farmers and are dedicated to profitable crops (fish and shrimp) are more willing to get involved in agriculture (85% of fish and shrimp farmer's children). On the other hand, those whose parents' farm are not economically satisfactory (54% of rice farmer's children), whose parents have no land (71% of landless' children), or whose parents are not farmers (70% of non-farmer's children), do not consider becoming farmers in the future. Young people's future plan and involvement in agriculture relies thus on their parents' legacy and the potential to inherit a profitable farm or not.

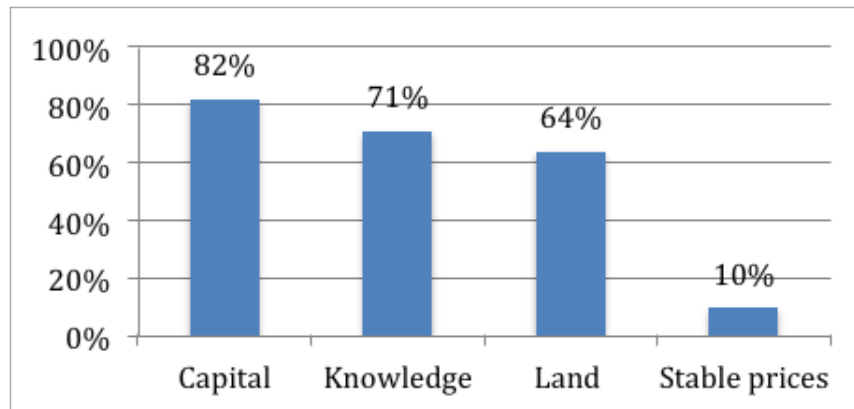
If it was possible to start on the farm of their dreams

We asked young people to imagine what could be the farm of their dreams, that is to say, the farm that they would like to do if they had no constraints in terms of accessing land, capital, etc. Young people's dream farms are diverse: some wanted to have a farm with multiple productions (5 respondents), fruits and vegetables (7 respondents), fish and shrimp (5 respondents), chicken farm (2 respondents), and some even mentioned rice (7 respondents). Some other would like to continue their parents' farm (6 respondents), adding new crops (2) or expanding the land (9).

We then asked them whether they would be ready to become farmer in such a "dream farm", or whether they would still prefer to work in factories. Among interviewees, **75% said they would prefer to work in the dream farm rather than in factories.** Indeed, they consider that agriculture provides a higher quality of life and better working conditions; they have more independence and free time, and can stay at home with their families. Therefore it is their perception on farming based on their current situation and parent's experience, and the potential of inheriting a profitable farm (fish and shrimp) that pull young people's interest back, and push them to the growing sector in the area, industries.

For those that would be ready to farm their dream farm, we asked them what they would expect in terms of government support (Figure 3). Somewhat surprisingly, young people ranked knowledge support as more important than land access.

Figure 3: The type of support that young people would need from public policies



Conclusion

The study shows *the difference between the actual limited involvement of young rural people in farming and their interest in becoming a farmer if some key constraints were addressed*. Many young farmers are not planning to become farmers not for lack of interest, but because they do not see opportunities to start farming in conditions that would make sense for them to make a living from farming. Although, many young people perceive agriculture as a better way of living where they can stay in rural areas and build a life with their families.

There are three possible entry channels for young farmers to set up a farming activity: (a) family inheritance; (2) taking a whole farm from a retiring farmer; and (3) renting or buying land as a new farm. The results of this research study shows that the only way young people perceive as a feasible way to start farming is through family inheritance. Those who do not have the option to inherit a profitable farm would no consider farming as a future option, despite their desire to do so. Many young people would like to start farming but on the one hand, they do not see helping their parents as a profitable occupation and, on the other hand, lack of access to land and capital appear as unsolvable constraints. This is why they did not try to get the required knowledge to start farming.

Therefore the focus of public policies should not be on how to attract young people's interest back to farming, but to address the constraints that young people face to start farming. There have been to date limited initiatives to help young people to start farming. The Agricultural Land Reform Office supported, up to 2012 in Prachinburi Province, some young people in accessing a maximum of 5 rai of land, and after 2 years of monitoring, participants had the option to rent or buy the land at a lower price. Other local initiatives took place, such as *My Little Farm Project*, which is supported by various institutions. However, the support in terms of land and capital access, and the number of young people supported, have been limited to date. In particular, However, in many areas, 5 rai of land may not be sufficient to enable a profitable farm. Public policies could focus on enhancing young people's access to sufficient land and capital so as these young farmers can get engaged in farming as a life project.