

Mor-Long Village Doesn't Kid around with its New Goat Project

By Kathy Hornbach, Heifer International Volunteer, 4/2002

Mor-Long is an impoverished village in Northern Thailand, near the Myanmar border. Villagers are from the Akha Hill Tribe, an ethnic minority group that lives on steep, unproductive mountainsides. Heifer International Thailand (HIT) has been working with



this village for about nine months, helping them upgrade their stock and improve their animal management techniques for pigs, cows, chickens, fishponds, and kitchen gardens. The newest project in the village is with meat goats, one of the first goat placements in Thailand by HIT.

Goats are infrequently raised in Northern Thailand, because traditional management practices aren't very effective. It is difficult to keep the goats contained in a corral – they are magnificent escape artists – and can be very destructive once free. They graze so close to the ground they often destroy the pastures where they feed. Yet goats are an otherwise ideal match for the area – they thrive on many kinds of forage, are easy to raise and breed, and mature quickly. There is a ready market for goats -- they are highly valued by certain Hill Tribes, and there is also strong demand from the local Muslim population. Goats thus command a premium price – two to three times higher per

kilogram compared to pigs.

The villagers first learned about the possibility of raising goats during a HIT-sponsored study tour to a Thai Government Department of Livestock experimental farm. Two of the most experienced Mor-Long farmers immediately saw the potential. HIT had been looking for an opportunity to expand their program to include goats, and were searching for motivated, experienced farmers to run a pilot. At the same time, the Thai Royal Projects were interested in partnering with HIT to improve goat productivity for the

Highlands. It was a win-win-win for the villagers, the Royal Projects, and Heifer Thailand.

HIT loaned the villagers the money to purchase the goats and the Department of Livestock provided the initial goat management training. The two farmers collected local materials and constructed the pens themselves. They also decided to try an experiment – one family will pasture-graze their goats, penning them only in the evening. The other family will use zero-grazing, raising the goats entirely in pens and gathering local forage for their food. Both families will plant grass on steep hillsides to harvest for the goats – with the beneficial side-effect of providing much needed stabilization for the eroding hillsides. At the end of four or five months, they will compare the results – the health and weight of the goats, as well as the impact on the pastureland, and the ability to keep the goats fenced-in.

Both families plan to use the goats primarily for income, supplying the resources needed to continue their children's education, and improve family nutrition. They are also planning to re-invest to expand their farms and increase the productivity of their land.

The loan repayments from these two farmers will allow the village to “Pass on the Gift”, as the money they repay is lent to additional families so that they too may purchase stock. In addition, they will pass along the accumulated knowledge they have gained in highland goat management.

As the village improves its goat raising capabilities, HIT will be simultaneously partnering with a Thai Royal Project on improving goat productivity. Heifer China will provide some of its best quality goats as a gift to the Royal Family. The Royal Project will work on its experimental farm to develop optimal crosses for the Highlands. HIT will place the cross-bred goats with farm families, and monitor which crosses are most productive. Partnering with the animal husbandry school at Chiang Mai University as well as the Royal Project, HIT will oversee development of goat training targeted specifically for local conditions.

As the pilot project in Mor-Long proves itself, and the cross-bred goats become available, HIT will ensure that the new goats and the new knowledge are shared with villagers throughout the Northern Highlands, improving their income, nutrition, and educational opportunities for their children.

This long-term vision is all made possible because of the two Mor-Long families who were willing to take a risk in a new endeavor and work hard to ensure success. Mor-Long village doesn't kid around when it comes to making sure their goat project is a winner!