

THE THAILAND VETIVER NETWORK

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Introduction

Vetiver grass has been known to the Thai people since ancient times as a plant that grows wild in the plains almost everywhere in the kingdom. Thais have used vetiver in a number of ways, for example used the leaves for roofing and the roots in traditional medicines. These uses are currently limited in amount and location due to the convenience in using other materials which are more easily accessible.

Soil erosion resulting from improper management of agricultural land, particularly in sloping areas, is a major cause of productivity loss. Various techniques have been implemented by different organizations to address this problem. These include the application of engineering structures (such as the construction of earth banks or check dams) and biological control (such as the growing of different plant species along the contour lines). These techniques, however, have not been adopted by the farmers due either to their high cost or to competition with cash crops for nutrient, water and light. The idea of using vetiver grass for soil and water conservation was mooted by His Majesty the King of Thailand in June 1991. His Majesty conducted his own experiments and also advised the staff of the Royal Development Study Centre, the royal projects' stations and institutions which he visited to start learning about this plant. Various studies at different locations established that this grass was most effective for soil erosion control due to a number of advantages. For example, it has a profuse root system which grows mostly vertical, plus other desirable characteristics such as drought, fire and pest tolerance, ability to grow in a wide range of poor soils, and its unique ability to improve the fertility and moisture content of the soil without competing with cash crops. Many organizations involved in soil and water conservation research and development in Thailand have begun to implement this technology.

With people of different disciplines working on vetiver, information sharing became important and necessary. In 1997, the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board (ORDPB) established the Thailand Vetiver Network (THVN).

Objectives

- Collect information regarding vetiver research and development in Thailand.
- Provide information on the application of vetiver grass technology in Thailand to interested people and organizations, both in Thailand and other countries.
- Coordinate activities with other vetiver networks.
- Disseminate the information on vetiver grass, especially works conducted in Thailand in the form of electronic databases and websites.

Membership

All governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in the implementation of vetiver grass projects as well as in the use of vetiver grass in Thailand are automatically members of the Thailand Vetiver Network. At present, approximately 40 organizations with more than 300 scientific and extension staff members have been registered as the network's members.

* *Member of the Scientific, Evaluation and Monitoring Committee for the Vetiver Promotion Project, RDPB*

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Organization

Office

The secretariat office of THVN is located at the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board, 78 Rajadamnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok 10300, Thailand; tel. (662) 280 6193 to 280 6200; fax. (662) 280 6206, 629 8915; email address: vetiver@mail.rdpb.go.th; website: <http://thvn.rdpb.go.th>.

Staff

There is no full-time staff working for THVN. The persons in charge are Ms Suwanna Pasiri, head of the Information Section and Ms. Srinith Boonthong, Director of the Project Evaluation Division, ORDPB. Other staff members of ORDPB and other institutions (e.g. implementing organizations and universities) also assist in the operation of THVN. Dr. Weerachai Na Nakorn, Director of the Queen Sirikit Botanic Garden, acts as the chairman of the editorial board for the THVN newsletter, a quarterly vetiver publication named *Bhumivarin Anurak* in Thai.

Budget

All operational costs of THVN are met by either the government budget allocated to RDPB or the Chaipattana Foundation, His Majesty's own development foundation.

Activities

Collection of information

Information regarding vetiver implementation in Thailand has been collected in the form of a database and as printed material in close cooperation with the Committee for Scientific, Evaluation and Monitoring of the Vetiver Promotion Program of RDPB.

Newsletter

Up to now, nine issues of the Thai-language quarterly newsletter, *Bhumivarin Anurak*, have been produced.

Website

The THVN website contains the following information in both Thai and English:

- His Majesty the King of Thailand's initiatives
- Vetiver characteristics
- Vetiver multiplication and propagation
- Vetiver uses
- Vetiver research and extension
- Vetiver news
- About THVN

The site is updated on a regular basis and can be accessed at <http://thvn.rdpb.go.th>.

So far THVN has been very successful in disseminating information on vetiver grass in Thailand and has received much positive feedback from the audience all over the world.