

You invest in equipment for success. Would you consider helping Lao farmers do the same?

Why is help needed?

As a modern Australian farmer, you understand the struggle of managing weather variability, shrinking margins and decreasing labour availability. As South East Asia develops around them, southern Lao rice farmers face the same challenges. Monsoon rains are becoming less predictable and farm labour is becoming scarce as young people move to the cities. In Australia, we invest in technology and machinery to maintain productivity, but southern Lao farmers have many less resources to improve their practices.

The traditional method of hand-transplanting seedlings is becoming unviable. Farmers must wait for enough rain to fill the rice bays, and it takes the equivalent of 30 days of labour to transplant one hectare! These farm practices are no longer consistent with the region's economic development.



Mr Silea, of Alan Wattana village, in a drill-seeded rice crop established several weeks before the monsoon rains would have let him traditionally hand-transplant.

They must change their methods to grow the crops for their own needs, or to sell, even if family members have gone off-farm to opportunities that economic development is bringing the region. So far, Lao farmers have not had easy access to seeders to help them change their planting methods and transform their lives; neither farmers, equipment suppliers or extension staff have ever seen them!

Small, basic-but-capable seeders and basic training will improve Lao farmers' livelihoods almost overnight. A basic-but-capable seeder will help them establish rice and other crops on a range of soils and conditions with less labour. Not having to wait for enough rain for ankle-deep water enables earlier establishment for better and more reliable yields. They can also contract-seed for nearby farmers for extra income to help their livelihoods.

Some innovative, well-connected Lao farmers have already changed to seeding on their sandy soils with the very light and less-capable locally-made seeders they can access, as explained in this recent report, but they are few and far between; equipment suppliers have only just started supplying seeders. You can watch the land preparation and seeding process in this video. Better-designed seeders are available to service a much wider range of conditions to allow *everyone* to make the change.

Once more farmers experience the improved equipment and the livelihood benefits they bring, they will quickly learn to use them for the benefit of their farming system and family. Equipment suppliers will likewise see the value of improved seeding equipment, and supply that need. These basic-but-capable seeders will feed the innovation process that is primed to happen.

What will we do to help?

We are able to import small, basic-but-capable seeders into southern Laos. These seeders are well-designed, but low-cost and well-suited to the very small farmer fields in tropical Laos. Hence, we will feed a growing interest in mechanisation and aim to:

- Supply around 50 quality, basic-but-capable seeders to farmers in key rice areas of Khammuan and Savannakhet Provinces, Laos, at 30% of the purchase price

- Facilitate local seeder manufacture and spare parts supply
- Train the recipient families to use the seeders
- Conduct village-based trials based on farmer questions and issues
- Conduct field days to promote farmer-to-farmer exchange...the best way to spread farming knowledge in any country



Alan Wattana farmers seeding the first drill-seeding trials with a prototype seeder, December 2013



A basic National seeder from the Punjab. It can seed a range of crops on all soil types, and can place fertiliser with the seed

How can you help?

As an individual or with friends, you can make a one-off, *tax-deductible* \$3,250 donation through the Crawford Fund for the purchase, supply and training for one seeder, and receive:

- Your name on the seeder, details of the recipient and confirmation of its delivery
- A description of the village and region, the farming systems in it and the challenges it faces
- A report after the first year that includes the seeder's activities, successes and failures, and the effects on recipient's and village livelihoods
- The opportunity to communicate with and/or visit the recipient if you wish
- The knowledge that you have made a difference for a farmer, their family and community

How is this managed?

This project has been designed and will be overseen by Dr Leigh Vial, a NSW Riverina farmer and Nuffield Scholar with seven years' experience in Lao and Asian farming systems, including four years at the International Rice Research Institute, the pre-eminent global rice research centre.

The funds will be received, distributed and accounted-for by the Crawford Fund, a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity authorised to receive tax-deductible donations. The Crawford Fund's mission is to increase Australia's engagement in international agricultural research, development and education for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, and has a long association with training in Laos.

If you are interested in learning more about assisting Lao farmers to improve their farming systems, and perhaps experiencing and learning about their lives and farms, please contact Leigh via email on leigh.k.vial@gmail.com or call him on 0403 489848.

Alternatively, you can make your donation directly on the Crawford Fund website at www.crawfordfund.org indicating your donation is for a 'Lao seeder'. You will automatically receive confirmation and a tax receipt, and further information.

The Crawford Fund can be contacted via email at cathy.reade@crawfordfund.org or phone 0413 575 934

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE