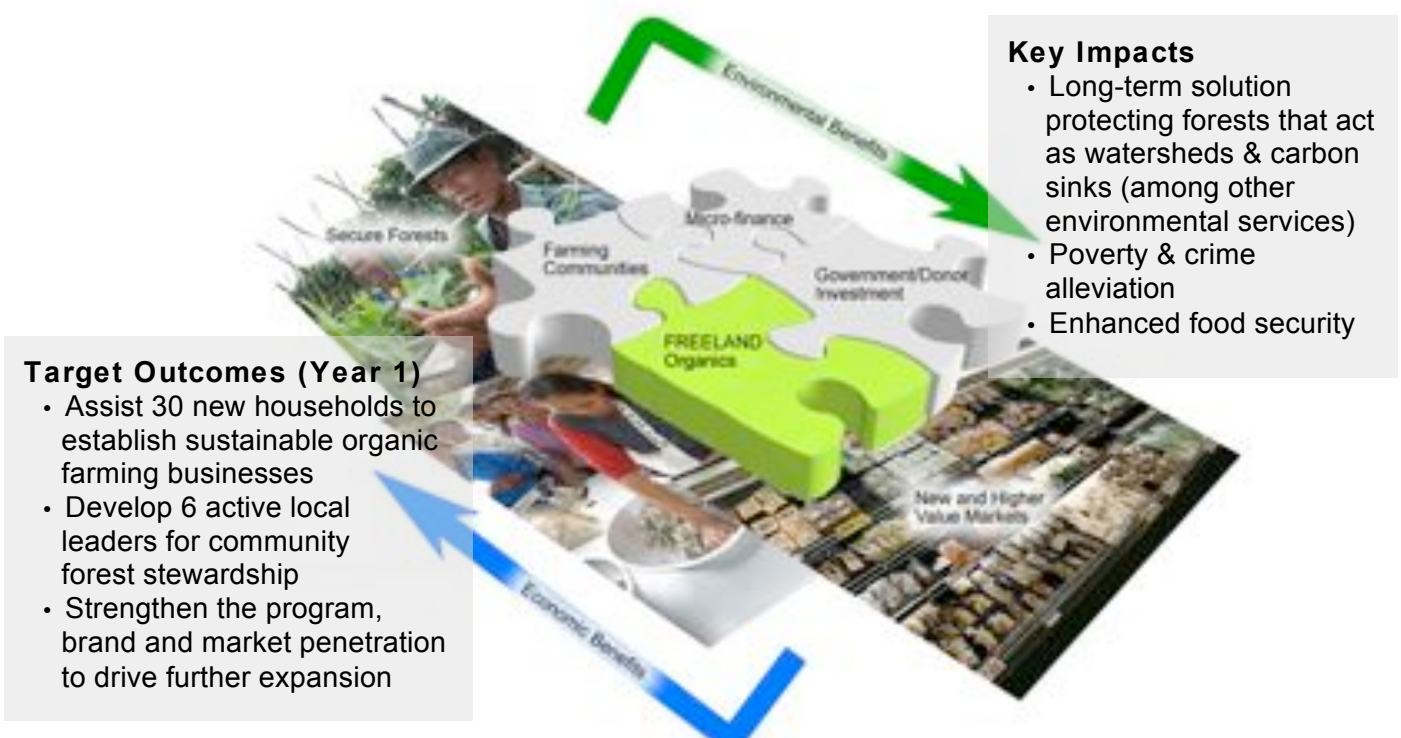


Franchising Forest Stewardship



Program member Somai Kunok at work in her mushroom barn

FREELAND Foundation is working to reduce poaching of endangered animals and illegal logging in Thailand by seeding sustainable, eco-friendly organic farming businesses. We are seeking partners to help expand a successful pilot project along the border of Central Thailand's Dong Phrayayen - Khao Yai (DPKY) Forest Complex. Through micro-finance and other forms of support, partners can help bring the benefits of FREELAND *Organics*, including (healthy) food security, to more rural communities.



People and Wildlife in Need



There are more than 300,000 people living in 600 rural villages in close proximity to the DPKY Forest Complex (home to critically endangered tigers, endangered elephants, threatened hornbills, bears, gibbons, and many other wild species). The few opportunities for employment pay low wages, barely enough to subsist on. Communities rely on the forest in many ways, but unsustainable poaching and logging is damaging the environment and even threatening legitimate livelihoods, such as farming.

Scope and Approach

With partner support, the FREELAND *Organics: Franchising Forest Stewardship* program aims to engage communities in Central Thailand on a scale that results in a measurable rebound in wildlife populations within 3-5 years. If successful, it will become a model that can be expanded and replicated around Thailand's protected areas, for the benefit of local communities, living forests and a stable climate.



Program base location in relation to the DPKY Forest complex

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FREELAND's village surveys have revealed that the main reason local people poach wild animals or cut wood illegally is the stark lack of alternative ways to make a living (including lack of access to funds to start their own legitimate business) and lack of knowledge about the negative impacts of poaching and its unsustainability. They are fully aware of the risks of being arrested by park authorities and being injured or falling ill in the wild, as well as the potential long-term consequences for their families. Most poachers would prefer to change to a sustainable and legitimate livelihood, if given the chance.

To begin to create a 'community forest stewardship shield' around the DPKY Forest Complex, FREELAND is applying its consultative approach to engage new villages. This includes highlighting pilot program successes and education on conservation benefits. Families and individuals are equipped with the skills and materials needed to establish their organic mushroom farming business and supported until their business reaches self-sufficiency (normally 6-12 months).

The program is being run and expanded by five on-site support staff based at the Training, Wholesale and Processing Center working in conjunction with two program coordination and marketing staff based in Bangkok. Mobile outreach staff engage target communities near the border of the DPKY Forest Complex and provide organic mushroom cultivation and business training, as well as ongoing logistical support (such as materials purchasing, inventory, book keeping and banking).



Training conducted with the support of key program partner Phra Dabos Foundation

Progress Already Made

In 2009, with support from the Blue Moon Fund, FREELAND conducted market research establishing significant demand for fresh produce and value-added products. Thailand's organic produce sector is at a relatively early stage of development, but is growing rapidly.

With Blue Moon Fund support and help from the local Wang Mee Sub-district Administrative Office, FREELAND has constructed a Training, Wholesale and Processing facility – located in close proximity to the target communities at Wan Nam Keaw, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Central Thailand (see map previous page).

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The partially outfitted Training, Wholesale and Processing Center (inset: mushroom barns)

The pilot program in three flagship villages has so far helped thirty-one ex-poacher households establish sustainable and growing mushroom farming businesses. These businesses supply the FREELAND *Organics* wholesale arm (which currently delivers all profits from sales to growers).

Since 2009, an average of more than **eight metric tons of fresh organic mushrooms** has been produced and sold each year. Program members have been able to reinvest a healthy portion of profits back into their businesses.

Strong community forest stewardship has been developed. Surveys of the pilot program have shown it has **reduced poaching by up to 70%** in nearby forest areas, giving over-exploited ecosystems and endangered wildlife populations a chance to rebound.

Program Needs

To continue and expand alternative livelihoods under FREELAND *Organics*, financial support is needed for the following:

- Capital for FREELAND administered micro-finance to help new program members buy the materials to establish their businesses (loans rolling from household to household)
- Complete outfitting of the newly constructed Wang Nam Keaw training and wholesale facility, adding capacity for value-added food product processing
- Employment of additional community outreach and agriculture support staff
- Transport and vehicle maintenance (including fuel costs for outreach, member support and produce transport)
- Product and brand development and market expansion

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Proposed Activities (2012)

1. Preparation

- 1.1 Hire two additional outreach staff
- 1.2 Preliminary community consultation in new villages
- 1.3 Supplementary market research
- 1.4 Develop mobile training team work plan
- 1.5 Organize and schedule produce cultivation and collection processes

2. Implementation

- 2.1 Visit communities to promote the concept and engage new program members
- 2.2 Complete outfitting of the Training, Wholesale and Processing Center
- 2.3 Deliver materials and training
- 2.4 Business development support for growers (banking, book keeping, planning)
- 2.5 Expand wholesale channels and product awareness
- 2.6 Wildlife Conservation Leaders Workshop

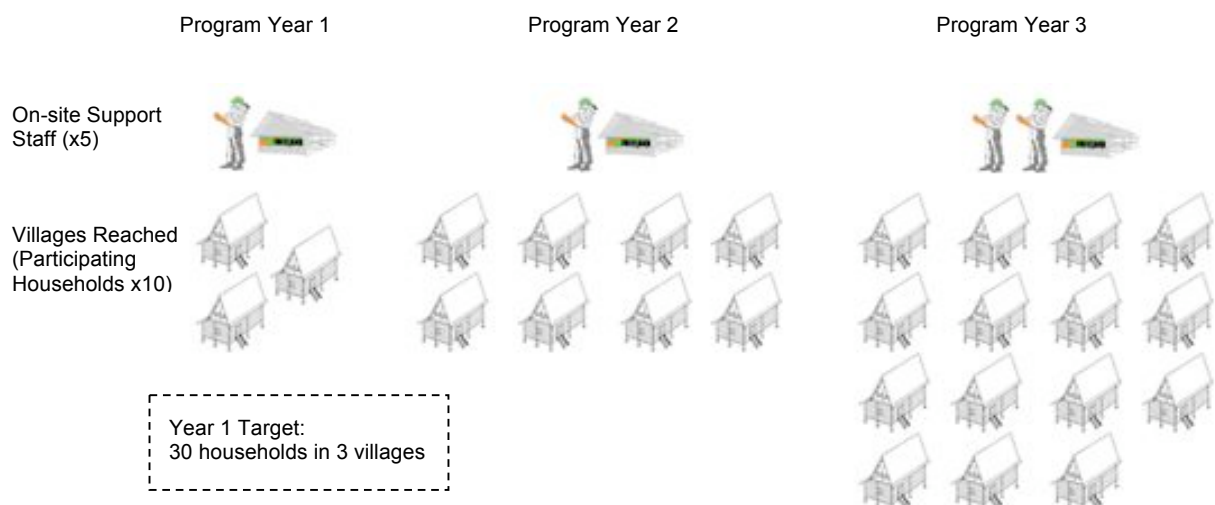
3. Strengthening and Evaluation

- 3.1 Monthly follow up consultation and support for program members
- 3.2 Continue to seek new and higher value on-sale markets
- 3.3 Monitor business and environmental results

4. Developing a model and plan for national replication

- 4.1 Engage community groups and government representatives to observe the program in action through study visits
- 4.2 Create, refine and publish a training package

Program Reach Targets



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Expected Results and Outputs

- Increase in legal employment, incomes and quality of life for communities living along the border of the DPKY Forest Complex
- Decrease in wildlife poaching and illegal tree cutting in the DPKY Forest Complex
- A permanent shield of community forest stewardship led by program members
- Lower risk of conflict between park protection authorities and local communities
- Increased organic food production for greater (healthy) food security
- A stronger FREELAND *Organics* brand and growing wholesale franchise group that can support administrative and logistics costs of the program and its further expansion
- A model for national replication around Thailand's protected areas and a training package to guide this, which can in turn provide a model for the region

Evaluation and Replication

The success of program members and the FREELAND *Organics* wholesale support business will be continually evaluated based on profitability and growth, as well as community feedback. Member loan repayments will fund loans to new households. Wholesale profits will continue to subsidize running costs and expansion of the program. Education outreach success will be monitored through surveys conducted during follow-up franchise support calls. The program will continue to be refined in response to results and feedback.

FREELAND conducts wildlife monitoring projects in the DPKY Forest Complex with the support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Thailand's Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, making it an ideal location to observe short and longer term impacts of the *Franchising Forest Stewardship* project on wildlife populations. Partnering with other conservation and research groups active in the Complex, FREELAND can monitor changes in wildlife abundance throughout the project.

Government representatives, private sector and community leaders from surrounding provinces and the capital will be invited to observe the project in action and will be consulted on tailoring it for replication. During the first year of partner support, a training package will be created, fine-tuned and published to aid replication. Program replication in Thailand could then serve as a model for other South and Southeast Asian nations.

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Partnering with FREELAND to Franchise Forest Stewardship

FREELAND Foundation is seeking support from a diverse range of partners to further develop the FREELAND *Organics: Franchising Forest Stewardship* program. Please refer to our 'Program Needs' section on page 4. In addition to crucial financial support, we welcome pro-bono expertise, business links and help spreading the word.

This is a unique opportunity for partners to contribute directly to long-term rural poverty alleviation, (healthy) food security, biodiversity and forest preservation in Thailand.

To discuss a partnership or find out more about the program, please contact Project Coordinator Mukda Thongnaitham (mukda@freeland.org or +66-02-204-2721).



FREELAND staff collect fresh organic produce from program member businesses

About FREELAND

FREELAND is a Thailand-based international organization dedicated to ending the illegal wildlife trade, conserving natural habitats and protecting human rights. We work throughout Asia, raising public awareness and building local capacity to protect critical ecosystems and the freedom of all living beings.

FREELAND provides direct protection to national parks and sanctuaries by training and equipping forest rangers to more effectively prevent poaching and illegal logging. FREELAND also helps local communities develop plant nurseries, fish and mushroom farms, renewable energy sources and begin reforestation, making a real difference in people's lives, while reducing pressures on ecosystems.

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