

PURE RELIGION

Lift Up Thy Hands

In a small village several hundred kilometers outside of Bangkok, Thailand, an elementary school teacher prepares for the school day. Before she leaves her modest home, she packs some extra rice for a few of the students in her class—students who, without this rice, will have nothing to eat during the day.

In 2000, Thailand's Ministry of Welfare and Labor reported that 3.7 million children in Thailand suffered from malnutrition. Rice, the staple food in Thailand, is low in protein, a critical element that helps develop strong bodies and active minds.

School administrators throughout the country recognized that the best way to alleviate malnutrition was to encourage new agricultural projects that would not only supply needed nutrition to hungry students, but provide a source of income for the schools. They proposed projects from growing vegetables and mushrooms to spawning fish to raising chickens and ducks for eggs and meat. However, the one thing these administrators lacked was the funding to make their dreams become a reality.

In the Surin Province of Thailand, Elder Joel Sperry and Sister Kathryn Sperry—who were serving a humanitarian mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—requested \$14,700 to fund several small agricultural projects. The proposal was approved and the Sperrys went to work.

The Lamduan elementary school, for example, wanted to raise chickens, mushrooms,

and vegetables. The Sperrys helped them purchase the chickens (with feed and medicine) and the mushroom spores and other materials for the gardens. In 1999, the school produced enough chicken that they were able to include it on the lunch menu. They sold enough mushrooms to buy an equal amount the next year. The vegetable gardens became a permanent part of the school campus.



To date (January 2001), Elder and Sister Sperry have helped establish 30 similar projects in Surin. School officials have reported increases in protein consumption from 10 to as high as 30 percent. Not only do children now consume healthy and life-sustaining food, but the schools are now more self-sustaining as a result of the income they receive by selling surplus food.

Elder Sperry describes the scene as he and his wife visit the grateful children: “The children gather around [my wife and me] and respectfully bow in the traditional Thai way. They put their hands together at the chest, symbolizing the heart, and bow over until their fingertips touch their nose. Sometimes the whole school (of two or three hundred) will follow us out to show us their projects.” He expresses humbly, “They treat us royally.” Of his work with the Thai schools and the benevolence of the Church's humanitarian aid, he exclaims, “It has been the experience of a lifetime!”