CHAPTER 6
PRACTICES OF POLITICS IN CONTRACT FARMING OF ORGANIC RICE PRODUCTION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the practices of politics by farmers in fair trade and organic rice production system. Na Sawan farmers create negotiating spaces within the fair trade and organic rice production system; these practices can be situated in Li's (2007) concept of "practices of politics". Li describes the practices of politics as the expression of a critical challenge. It often starts out as a refusal of the way things are, and thus opens up a front of struggle. Hence, the practices of politics stand at the limit of the calculated attempt to direct conduct.

Li uses concept of "practices of politics" to describe how forest dwellers in National Park of Indonesia came to articulate a collective, critical position, and act on it. These practices of politics include forest dwellers' narratives of the injuries, the broken promises, the desperation, and the hope that persuaded them to take control of food farmland and attempt to build a better future for their families. The practices of politics by forest dwellers are outcome of the will to govern, as the farmers have been displaced from their original land, instilled habits of calculation, and formed desires for education and a home near a road with good access to markets (Li 2007:12).

Drawing on Li's notion of practices of politics, I argue that the practices of politics by farmers of Na Sawan sub-district include questioning quality standards, distrust in the expert knowledge, neglect and manipulation of organic rice scheme rules. The farmers' practices of politics here aim not to resist, but to create negotiating space within the organic rice production system which they are part of it.

The farmers question international standards imposed on them can be seen as a practice of politics. The development program emphasizes that twenty locally-established rules be followed. Instead of strictly following the rules imposed on them,

however, farmers choose to follow the rules which benefit them and ignore to follow the rules that they consider too costly. The farmers question the standardization of organic rice production, and the assessment of risk of contaminations adopted by the experts, and the calculation method adopted by the experts. Dialogues and contestations between the farmers and experts concerning issues of certified rice seeds, risk management, and estimated yields are examined. These contestations between lay producers and experts in the processes of inspection and certification point to areas of tensions, contingency, and vulnerability within the abstract systems.

6.2 Questioning Certified Rice Seeds

Questioning certified rice seeds[59] is a practice of politics; it is the challenge to the legitimacy of the abstract system and experts. The farmers' questioning of the standard of rice seeds represents the peasant distrust in standardization and certification systems. The experts blame the substandard quality of the organic rice sold by the farmers to the project on the farmers' lack of capacity to undertake rational farming practices. The experts argue that with expert advice, management orientation, and more care, the percentage of contamination would be lower. The focus here is on the ignorance of the farmers versus the knowledge of the experts and the need to diffuse more information about adequate farming practices. Because the experts claim to sell "quality" rice seeds to the farmers, if the experts find the farmers selling contaminated rice to the project, the farmers would be punished. The penalty for the farmers who sell contaminated rice to the project is a deduction of one percent of their total rice sales.

However, the farmers argue against the expert's claim of organic rice seed standardization. They argue that the project sells them inferior quality rice seeds, and a mixture of glutinous rice seeds and jasmine rice seeds. This argument against the expert's claim of organic rice seed standardization reflects two positions. One is that the farmers distrust the experts, and see contingency in the certification system.

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[59] Rice seeds can be classified into three categories. The first is rice seed which is sold on the market. The second type is rice seed which is a starter seed (called in Thai as "*Pan Lak*") which is not sold in the market, but is used as a breeding seed. The third type of rice seed is an expansion seed (called in Thai as "*Pan Kayai*") which is promoted to the farmers as rice crop seed.

Another is that the farmers challenge legitimacy of the experts by pointing out the vulnerability of the experts. This error is illustrative of the contingency and vulnerability of the experts (Observation, training program for organic farmers, February 15, 2008).

The development project tries to build up the peasants' trust in the certified rice sees and expert knowledge. They hire the committee members of the producers' group which are internal experts to produce rice seeds instead of external experts. Afterwards, rice seeds are certified by the experts of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives before they are sold to the farmers. The project experts claim that this method would help eradicate the problem of contamination caused by mixing jasmine rice and other rice. But, the farmers reject the purification of certified rice seeds (Observation, training program for organic farmers, February 15, 2008).

Moreover, the farmers complain about the illegitimacy of various aspects of the project. For instance, they complain that the scales are not accurate; they complain that the payment was not the full amount. My observations in the annual meeting found that very few farmers were willing to question the scales during annual meetings. It would have met with vehement denial from the project officers. The farmers did not dare confront the officers but would criticize the project amongst themselves. One farmer told the researcher:

> *Their scales are not up to standard. The officers engage in corruption this way. The villagers object to the scale they use, but the head of the project says that a government official guarantees it. One farmer I know used his own scales to weigh his rice. There was a 200 kg difference in the weight measured by the project and his own scales. This farmer asked sarcastically whether it was possible for 200 kg of rice to drop in weight during transport. When the project officer weighs the rice, the boss is never there to monitor and never sees any cheating. When the members complain, the boss becomes annoyed. The villagers live with the rice, plant it, weigh it, and sell it all their lives. They are used to weighing rice. Why don't we know that they will weigh our rice with rice lost? Another thing, when they pay us, they don't pay us the full amount. Another farmer had 2,000 baht missing. This is the way they cheat us (Interview, Pithi Taworn, August 17, 2008).*

The farmers complain about the accuracy of the scales as illustrated above points the illegitimacy of the experts. I learn from Anthony Giddens's who suggests

that the modern society are deeply bound up with mechanisms used for the creation of trust in the abstract systems and trust in the expertise. When the lay persons encounter representatives of abstract systems at the access points, they recognize that they cannot trust the abstract system. The experts play a key role in controlling reality in the "front stage" (what presents in the public domain) and "backstage" (what happens behind the scene and in private domain) of access point. The experts need to express their professional expertise by minimizing the difference between the reality of the front-and backstage of an abstract system. The peasant mistrust in the expert systems thus means doubting the claims to integrity that expert's actions embody or display (Giddens 2001). Drawing on Giddens's argument, I argues that farmers argue against on a difference between the "front-stage" or what is claimed by the experts, and the "backstage" or what is observed by the farmers. It is to say that the farmers' questioning certified rice seeds and legitimacy of the experts provide them the ground for contesting the legitimacy of one-percent rice sale deduction.

6.3 Distrust in the Expert Knowledge

6.3.1 Distrust of the expert judgment on the risks of contamination

Additionally, the farmers distrust in the expert judgment on the risks of contamination is a practice of politics. The prohibition of chemical fertilizer and insecticide use in organic plot is new food governance, and organic agriculture is claimed to be a means of eradicating problems of environmental risk and food borne hazards. Yet, the experts play a key role in determining whether or not the degree of risk existing in organic plots is acceptable. In this study, there are two aspects of the critical argument between the project experts and the farmers concerning problems of waterborne and airborne contamination. One is the accusation that farmers use chemical fertilizer. Another is the accusation that farmers spray insecticide on organic plots. The charge of chemical fertilizer use in organic plots is serious, but only the project experts have the authority to render judgment. The farmers have no authority to oppose the experts. The experts perceive chemical fertilizer as dangerous as poison. Therefore, the penalty for farmers who use chemical fertilizer and pesticide is the

most severe (see the details of this penalty in Chapter Four). Once the farmers are judged by the experts to have contaminated their crops, they are forced to quit the project. As a result, their savings deducted from the rice price by one baht per kg would also be forfeited.

Despite the critical awareness of the risks relating to chemical fertilizer and insecticide use, it is difficult for the external inspectors on contract to recognize whether or not the farmers are using chemical fertilizer in the organic plots. The internal and external inspectors cannot monitor the farmers constantly throughout the year, since the field inspection of the total farmers takes too much time and is too costly. As a result, field inspections are performed by the internal inspectors a few times per year. The internal inspectors visit the farmers to check whether they have concealed the use of chemical fertilizer and insecticides. The inspectors scrutinize the houses, farms and warehouses. They look for evidence to prove whether the farmers have concealed the use of chemical fertilizer and insecticides. Subsequently, the external inspectors perform external inspection only one time per year; they typically inspect the document made by the internal inspectors. If the internal inspectors do not find a proof of violation of the rules, the external inspectors cannot find actual mistakes undertaken by the farmers.

The farmers recognize the limitation of field inspections and vulnerability of experts. For that reason, the farmers make use of this ambiguity to create a negotiating space in the field inspection and verification. The farmers recognize the experts' awareness of the risks relating to chemical fertilizer and pesticide use. My observations during 2008 to 2009 found that the farmers knew the experts' tricks in making a distinction between risky and safe peasant behavior. A farmer explains:

> *The internal inspectors always visit us before sowing or after transplant. They want to check whether or not the farmers put chemical fertilizer onto the fields. If we use chemical fertilizer, they can distinguish the color of the rice leaves which turn dark green, and the leaves curve and lengthen. If we do not use chemical fertilizer, the color of rice leaves will be light green and the leaves will be straight. I am afraid of being accused of using chemical fertilizer. I think that no one wants to put chemical fertilizer onto their paddy fields since the price of chemical fertilizer is very high*[60]*, and*

[60] The price of chemical fertilizer was almost 1,000 baht per 25 kg in 2007.

it is too risky breaking the rules (An interview with a farmer, Saisri Udom, Pathomrat Wongsa district, Amnatcharoean province, January 19, 2007).

Most farmers state that they do not use chemical fertilizer. However, violations of the rules have been recorded by the development project every year. For instance, in 2007 16 farmers were reported breaking the rules, comprising two percent of the total 607 farmers. These farmers were forced to quit the project. This statistic is an evidence of violations of the rules. It can also be seen as a clue to understanding the tension existing in the organic rice certification.

In formal interviews with the farmers, most answered that they did not use chemical fertilizer and insecticide. Use of chemical fertilizer in organic agriculture is strictly prohibited. Hence, it is impossible to expect a farmer to state flatly that he or she administers chemical fertilizer and insecticide in his or her organic plots. I find a difference between information obtained from the formal interviews with the farmers and what is obtained from informal discussions and observations. I find that the information obtained from the formal interviews with the farmers is partially true. The difference between information obtained from formal interviews and that obtained from informal discussions points to contradictions and tensions existing in the abstract systems. Studies of certification always involve the power of control and negotiation. It is therefore difficult to obtain information without the researcher falling under suspicion. Consequently, what I will illustrate in the following is a partial truth relating to the politics of organic agriculture and certification. I treat the story told by the project experts and the farmers as a partial truth which is closely related to the context in which it is constituted.

As the prohibition of chemical fertilizer and insecticide use in organic plot represents new food governance, I argue that the obscured behavior relating to chemical fertilizer and insecticide use is a tactic in response to the domination of regulations and certification and the power of the experts. De Certeau examines a tactic of resistance and the spaces of resistance used by the subordinated group. He argues that the tactic of resistance belongs to others. The subordinated group faces the powerful and uses intangible, invisible, unconscious desires, pleasures, enjoyments, fears, angers and hopes to challenge the domination. The spaces of resistance are multiple, dynamic and weak, and only ever in part controlled by the practices of

domination (Pile 1997). The hidden use of chemical fertilizer here is a tactic of resistance in response to the attempt to create spaces of purification and exclusion. Then, key questions are how the space of resistance is created, and what its implications for farmers' struggles are.

Although the prohibition of chemical fertilizer use is said to be strictly enforced on northeastern Thai farmers, non-organic and organic rice cannot be distinguished through extrinsic appearance. Some writers argue that agricultural-product certification is weak for two reasons. The first is that field inspection does not provide a complete snapshot of actual farming practices. The second is that field inspection is tied to weak certifying agencies via contracts (Mutersbaugh 2004; Renard 2005). For that reason, the farmers make use of this ambiguity to create a negotiating space in the field inspection and verification.

Moreover, the use of weapons of the weak such as rumor, gossip, and slander is also a practice of politics in response to domination (Scott 1985, Kerkvliet 2005). These practices signify a rupture of power of domination, a vulnerability of the abstract systems, and a room for maneuver created by the farmers. The non-organic farmers occasionally gossip about the unexpected behaviors of the organic farmers. The spread of gossip, rumor, and slander within the peasant communities in regard to the intentional use of chemical fertilizer and pesticide in the organic plots represents the practices of politics. In this context gossip, rumor and slander about chemical fertilizer and insecticide are employed by the organic farmers in response to market domination which constitutes the space of purification and of exclusion, and to challenge the legitimacy of quality control which has excluded the majority of non-organic farmers from access to niche markets. However, organic farmers hardly ever make concessions about concealed chemical fertilizer and pesticide use. Yet, the story of hidden use of chemical fertilizer is sometimes revealed by farmers who quit the project. Interestingly the concealed use of chemical fertilizer in organic plots serves to ensure certainty of yield, as a farmer confided:

> *Use of chemical fertilizer is prohibited. Yet some farmers secretly put chemical fertilizer onto their organic plots. We are concerned about the amount of chemical fertilizer to be used and proper time to use it. We might put chemical fertilizer before sowing and after transplant. We must*

put a little chemical fertilizer onto organic crops within limited areas in which yields are not properly grown. Chemical fertilizer is used here to assure certainty of yield. However, we will not put so much chemical fertilizer onto organic plots that the inspectors can detect. If someone puts chemical fertilizer onto the rice crops, it can be recognized by the inspectors because rice is high and the color of rice leaves is dark green. This could be easily noticed by the inspectors. If there are a lot of crabs, we might use a little chemical insecticide for killing crabs. Use of pesticide here is to ensure that rice crops will not be totally destroyed by the crabs. If we do not use chemical fertilizer and insecticide at all, how can we make sure that we would have sufficient rice for own consumption and for sale? Before, we didn't worry about red cards and being forced to quit the project. But now we are worried about being punished because we are afraid that our savings deducted from our rice sales will be forfeited. I can say that the prohibition of chemical fertilizer and insecticide is a tool employed to control us, and the new rule specifies that our savings will be forfeited if we break the rules. So, this is a means of tighter control (An interview with a farmer, Buakaen, Kaeng Nua sub-district, Khemmarat district, April 13, 2008).

I argue that farmers regard chemical fertilizer and insecticide differ from the experts. Northeastern Thai farmers have information about pesticide use, but they do not perceive that chemical fertilizer use as always dreadful. Use of chemical fertilizer for farmers helps to assure the certainty of yields and use of insecticide for them helps to minimize economic risks. Their perspectives regarding chemical fertilizer and insecticide more or less affect their decisions to use chemical fertilizer and insecticide in both conventional and organic plots. This study confirms the work of Guivant (2003) which cited that Mexican farmers regard chemical fertilizer as a symbol of efficiency to assure the certainty of yields and pesticide as a central tool for minimizing economic risks. Although the farmers consider organic agriculture beneficial to the environment and to their health, they do not perceive that chemical fertilizer use as always dreadful. Mexican farmers acknowledge pesticide risks relating to their health and environment differently from the experts. The farmers think that risks are ruled out because they are abstract, remote, and invisible. The denial of any serious risk is a coping strategy for the farmers in the condition that they

cannot avoid daily exposure to risk, and they want to bring it under control to avoid anxieties (Guivant 2003).

Then, I argue that the reasons why the farmers use chemical fertilizer are more complex than those the project experts use. The experts reduced it to a matter of cheating by the farmers and of greed. Project experts frequently warn farmers by recounting the stories of those who have practiced organic rice farming for four to five years and have been finally found to have violated the regulations by using chemical fertilizer, resulting in expulsion. However, there was never any thorough investigation in order to better understand whether or not farmers who had persevered long enough to be certified did indeed use chemical fertilizer. Why did some farmers resort to such behavior? The clandestine use of chemical fertilizer, if discovered, would result in their losing their entire investment spent during the transition period of three years. The researcher had the opportunity to interview one farmer who was forced to leave the project. The interesting point, however, was that even after leaving the project, this farmer continued to practice organic rice farming.

Ms. Somsook Wang-ngam is a representative of smallholder that has been truly marginalized. She had only ten rai of land and had very low income. Her husband had passed away when her third child was just born. She had no savings to invest in machines or equipment and plowed the fields using her and her buffalo's labor. As a widow, she bore the full burden of raising her three children. Two daughters worked outside the locality, so her son helped her work the farm. She had no funds to hire laborers and used her own labor at every stage of production. She had no time to accept jobs offered by her neighbors. As she did not have much land, the rice she grew was primarily for her family's consumption. The remaining rice for commercial sale amounted to roughly 4,000-5,000 baht per year, but this income went to pay for the initial investment, which means that she did not make any profit at all. Her two daughters remitted some money to help her paying for her other living expenses, and her son worked in a factory during the dry season. She borrowed money from a revolving fund of the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives. Ms. Somsook was very committed to the ideals of organic agriculture, practicing it for over seven years, making her own compost fertilizer, and raising buffaloes for manure.

Ms. Somsook was among the first generation of participants in the project. She had faith in organic agriculture and decided to join the project. She believed it made both farmers and consumers safe from chemicals and that it would nurture the land's fertility and the ecological system. A few years after completing the transition process and becoming fully certified, she was given a red-card and was forced to leave the project for illicitly using chemical fertilizer. When I met her for the first time, Ms. Somsook admitted that she was forced to leave and made no excuses. However, I was struck by the fact that many years after leaving the project, she was still practicing organic agriculture. She confided to the researcher that she had been expelled because her daughter who worked in Bangkok put chemical fertilizer on her field. When asked why her daughter had done so, Ms. Somsook explained:

> *That day I returned from the seedlings field, working in the hot sun all day. I was tired and hungry. I went into the kitchen to steam rice. I felt very faint, almost to the point of falling on the floor, and lost consciousness. My neighbor came and gave me first aid and called my daughter working in Bangkok, telling her to hurry home. When my daughter came home, she was cross with me for stubbornly exerting myself so much for organic rice farming. She was unhappy with the way organic rice farming was making me so exhausted, so she went out and bought chemical fertilizer and administered it to my fields in order to make me quit. When the inspector came, he found the chemical fertilizer, and I was expelled, which satisfied my daughter. (An interview with a farmer, Ms. Somsook, Na Sawan sub-district, Khemmarat district, April 13, 2008).*

Why does Ms. Somsook's daughter choose the method of applying chemical fertilizer to her mother's fields in order to have her removed from the project? Her daughter saw that the work was too demanding and not worthwhile. Nevertheless, she herself persisted in her organic rice farming practice, even if the rice she sold could not fetch the organic rice price. She continues to practice organic rice farming to this day. Her neighbors teased her for being a true organic farmer without the credentials. Somsook is a small-scale farmer who actually believes that organic agriculture is good for health and the environment. Yet, she cannot practice organic agriculture and receive high rents.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Five, the small-scale farmers are vulnerable; they are at risk of being forced to quit organic rice production because they diversify crops. Diversification of crops allows them greater access to resources and incomes; at the same time it causes them to risk loss if they are found to be violating the rules. I argue that the smallholders are increasingly vulnerable because they are forced to depend on organic rice farming only. However, they cannot survive by doing so. Indeed, they are more marginalized, in the cases where their livelihood options are diminished.

Secondly, the risk of contamination comes from the farmers spray insecticide on organic plots. The organic plots connected to conventional plots are considered bearing a high risk of airborne contaminations. Hence, the external inspector always selects the organic plots which are connected to the conventional plots as samples for field inspection. The farms connected to the organic plots are required to level the terrace of the organic plots so that they are higher than that of the conventional plots in order to prevent waterborne contamination. This regulation increases production costs, although it cannot insure against waterborne contamination because during flooding the paddy field terraces are always destroyed.

How the regulation is imposed on the farmers? And, what are its implications to nature and social relations in rural community? The field inspection case of Tongpan illustrates the way in which this requirement is enforced and its costs. Tongpan is a representative of medium-scale farmer who owns 24 rai of land and has engaged in organic rice farming in the second year of the transitional period. He was selected by the external inspector from IMO as a sample for field inspection in 2007. After the external inspector walked around his paddy field; he found that his organic plot had two significant concerns. The first was the fact that one side of his organic plot was connected to a road, but the road did not appear on the map. The internal inspector told the external inspector that when the plot map was first made, this organic plot was connected to another conventional plot, and the road had not yet been constructed. The internal inspector also suggested that Tongpan uplift the terrace of his paddy field. Tongpan had already rebuilt the terrace at the recommendation of internal inspector. Then, the external inspector suggested the internal inspector update the plot map. The second concern was that the terrace of another side of the organic

plot was damaged due to a heavy flood. Water from the conventional plot could run into the organic rice plot, increasing the risk of waterborne contamination. Therefore, the external inspector suggested Tongpan repairs the terrace of his paddy fields, which would cost many thousands baht. Tongpan requested funds from a governmental body because his plot ran along a public road, but the governmental body finally allocated a budget of roughly only 400 baht to support the repair of the terrace. He had to bear the bulk of the burden of the repair costs himself and repair the terrace within one year (Fieldnotes, Ban Kok Klang, Na Vieng Sub-District, Senangkanikom District, Amnartcharoean Province, December 17, 2007).

Even if Tongpan repaired the terrace of his paddy field according to the recommendation of the external inspector, there was no guarantee that the water from conventional plot would not run into his plot during flooding. From the perspective of the conventional farmers, it was useless trying to prevent waterborne contamination during flooding. However, the external inspector argued that the farmers do not use chemical fertilizer in the rainy season, so risk of waterborne contamination during flooding is acceptable. Therefore, the role of experts is vital, since it determines whether or not the degree of risk is acceptable and how to transform uncertainty into acceptable risk. The external inspector's explanation demonstrates that organic agriculture is not chemical free. Indeed, organic agriculture involves the assurance that some measures are implemented to prevent contamination.

I learn from Alex Hughes' suggestion that the dilemmas of governance are found within two broad areas of debate. The first is the interpretation of the clause in the code. And, the second is the questions of code implementation concerned with methods of auditing, reporting, verifying, and conducting corrective action with suppliers who do not comply with the clauses in the code (Hughes 2006). According to organic regulations, it is assumed that if a waterway runs from conventional plots into organic plots, there is high risk of waterborne contamination. Therefore, the farmers who own organic plots are required to block the irrigation waterway to prevent water from the conventional plots from running into the organic ones. Moreover, the farmers are required to seek a new water supply to fulfill the need for water in the organic plots. Therefore, this regulation is a burden on the farmers; it also creates new conflicts between the farmers and their neighbors.

Samai, a farmer who was inspected by the external inspector in 2007, is an example of a farmer who was suggested by the external inspector to block his public waterway in order to prevent water from his neighbor's conventional plot from running onto his organic plot. After the external inspector from IMO walked around his fields, he noted that Samai's organic fields were next to non-organic fields and his organic plots were lower than his neighbor's non-organic ones. The inspector found that there was an irrigation ditch through which the water from the non-organic fields could directly flow onto Samai's fields. Samai grew both organic glutinous and jasmine rice, the former next to his neighbor's field. The organic glutinous rice therefore directly received water from his neighbor's plot. Even if Samai explained that the glutinous rice plot is served as a buffer zone between the two types of fields, the external inspector did not agree with the arrangement, because the land was immediately next to each other and there was a chance of waterborne contamination of the jasmine rice plot. There was a long discussion between the external inspector, internal inspector, and Samai. The following conversation was part of their discussion:

External inspector: How much land do you have?
Samai: 27 rai
External inspector: Where do you get your water?
Samai: I use rain water. I don't use water from natural streams. But that water drainage ditch is for the adjacent non-organic plot.
External inspector: Can you close off that water drainage ditch?
Samai: (hesitatingly, showing discomfort, and answers equivocally) I have to talk to my neighbor first and see if he will permit it because he has to find some other way to drain water from his field.
External inspector: How many times have the internal inspectors come to inspect?
Samai: Twice.
External inspector: Who is the internal inspector?
Internal inspector: I am.
External inspector: How many livestock do you have?
Samai: I have two cows. I have no buffalo and no chicken. I have 20 ducks.
External inspector: Do you collect much manure?
Samai: I compost two tons of organic fertilizer and collect nearly a ton of animal manure.
External inspector: Do you have natural plant insect repellents?

Samai: I don't have them because I only get a few insects that don't do much damage.
External inspector: The recommendation of the previous inspector was to plant shrubs to prevent airborne contamination. This does not appear to be in the internal inspector's report, and there is no reference to airborne contamination. What's more worrying is waterborne contamination from the non-organic plot to the organic one. The problem must be solved immediately. If you can close off the water drainage ditch you can grow jasmine rice, but can it be done?
Samai: I have to speak to my neighbor (in a hesitant voice)

In the end, the external inspector recommended that Samai have the water drainage ditch closed off to prevent waterborne contamination and that he find an alternate water source. He was clearly reluctant to follow the requirement because of the potential objection from his neighbor. If he follows the requirement, he cannot avoid conflict with his neighbor. Yet, if he refuses to follow the requirements, he is at risk of being forced to quit the project. Another option is that Samai was urged to persuade his neighbor to join the project and turn to organic rice farming. This option can create a win-win situation, but the possibility of the win-win situation depends on decision of his neighbor, not his desire. Additionally, the external inspector recommended that he build the barrier between the non-organic and organic fields higher and grow organic glutinous rice in all the plots bordering the non-organic field. Finally, the external inspector recommended using tiny mesh as a water barrier to prevent contamination. Samai had to complete these adjustments before the next external inspection the following year (Fieldnote, Samai Kaytan, Non Sung village, Senangkanikom District, Amnartcharoean Province, 17 December, 2007).

Growing life-barrier trees is another measure required to prevent airborne contamination from the spraying of insecticide on the neighbor's plot, if their organic plots are connected to conventional plots (See Chapter Four). The farmers are occasionally unable to comply with this regulation because of objections from their neighbors, as their neighbors might worry that shade trees and shrubs may block sunlight, take up underground water, or attract rice-destroying insects. To manage paddy land, the farmers have to be concerned about the permission of their families because most land belongs to families. For this reason, it is difficult for an individual farmer to do anything without the agreement of his or her family and neighbors. For

instance, the farmers whose paddy land is connected to conventional plots might either neglect or hesitate to follow this requirement since the waterway is a form of common property, and blocking the waterway is always opposed by their neighbors.

If the farmer cannot grow life-barrier trees for whatever reason, an agreement between the organic and conventional farmers is required to ensure that the conventional farmers do not spray chemical insecticide on their own land. This requirement creates tensions between the farmers and the project experts, since the farmers argue that they have no right to force their neighbors to make an agreement. Moreover, the requirement of making an agreement has become a source of conflict between the farmers and their neighbors. The interactions the farmers and the project experts in a meeting on March 26, 2008 illustrate in the fallowing point to the contingency and tension existing in the certification system:

> *Farmer: What can I do if my neighbors do not want to sign their name on an agreement?*
> *Project expert: You should ask them softly for their cooperation.*
> *Farmer: I do not think they will agree with this idea. They might say if I had the right to ban something, then they would do it.*
> *Project expert: You need to ask for cooperation. An agreement between the farmer and the neighbor who grows conventional crops is needed. It would ensure that their neighbors do not use chemical pesticide. It would also make the external inspector know that the necessary measure is being implemented to prevent airborne contamination.*
> *Farmer: If the neighbor agrees to sign his or her name on an agreement, but still uses chemical fertilizer on their conventional plots, what can I do?.*
> *Project expert: Spraying chemical insecticide is more critical than using chemical fertilizer, as it easier to create the problem of airborne contamination in the organic plots. Chemical fertilizer can create the risk of waterborne contamination.*
> *Farmer: Farmers do not spray chemical insecticide in this area.*
> *Project expert: Perhaps the farmers might spray in the future. For this reason, they need to plant trees to prevent the airborne contamination.*
> *Farmer: I am not them. I cannot convince them to agree with me.*
> *Project expert: Don't worry. An extension service officer will negotiate with the neighbor for you.*

Therefore, I argue that enforcement of international regulations in rural communities of developing countries has frequently brought about new burdens on farmers. To follow the regulations, some measures are made compulsory. Natural

space and social relations both within the households and within the peasant community must be transformed according to the regulations. The implementation of the regulations has transformed natural environment, like land and irrigation waterway, from common property to private property in order to facilitate capitalists' profit-making and accumulation. Practices such as growing life-barrier trees between rice plots, building fences along the rice plots, and blocking waterways run counter to the ways that common property had been formerly used prior to the advent of international regulations. If land and irrigation waterway is treated as private property, a large number of farmers are excluded from their traditional access to these natural resources. Thus, the enforcement of international regulations in rural communities of northeastern Thailand has been accompanied by new forms of conflict.

Another source of conflict in the certification process was the raising of pigs. Raising livestock and growing rice always go hand in hand in the Northeast. Raising pigs and chickens is a saving mechanism for rural households. Medium-scale and large-scale farmers adopt the strategy of sending their young adults to work outside the agricultural sector but investing their remittance funds in raising pigs. Not only are pigs and chickens a source of food, they can be sold for supplementary income when the parents need money. Moreover, raising pigs is a strategy employed by farming households to cope with problem of a labor shortage because villagers have been increasingly working outside the agricultural sector. Raising pigs requires intensive capital but not intensive labor. The parents can spend what leftover time they have from growing rice in taking care of the pigs. Their children can come back from non-agricultural work and help raise pigs without having to hire additional labor. According to the BIO-SUISSE regulations, the project instituted a regulation prohibiting the raising of livestock in a confined space and harmful conditions. Moreover, the health of the livestock kept on organic farms had to be strictly monitored, with a proper system of veterinary treatment. Due to these regulations, many farmers raising pigs and other livestock became guilty of violations.

An example of a farmer who was inspected by an external inspector from IMO in 2007 illustrates the disorder and conflict created by the livestock regulations. They disrupted a long-practiced pattern of farming and livelihood that involved both livestock raising and rice growing in the Northeast. When the external inspector

walked around the fields of Mr. Sombat Na-ngam of Na Dee Village, Nong Pua Sub-District, Kemmarat District, who was a large-scale farmer of 50 rai of land, he found a pig pen in the middle of his fields. The inspector found that he lacked a proper veterinary treatment system and 23 pigs were kept on a small cage. This violation of rule ensued a discussion between the external inspector, internal inspector, and the Sombat's spouse. The following are parts of their exchange:

> *External inspector: How many pigs are you raising? They look crowded in their pen. According to* BIO-SUISSE *regulations, it is a violation of rule. You can't crowd pigs in tightly.*
> *Sombat's spouse: There are 23 pigs, but most of them are piglets. Their mother died after giving birth. We plan to sell the piglets. As for the mixed breed pig, we plan to sell it very soon. The pen won't be very crowded.*
> *External inspector: Can you leave these pigs to find food on their own? You don't have to feed them in a pen.*
> *Sombat's spouse: We can't because they will all be lost [Her voice expressed shock and consternation; afterwards she explained to the researcher that if they released the pigs, they would all certainly be stolen.]*
> *External inspector: In one year, how much manure and compost do you make?*
> *Sombat's spouse: About six tons (6,000 kg) total of cow and pig manure.*
> *External inspector: Is it enough?*
> *Sombat's spouse: It isn't enough; we only apply it to some plots.*
> *External inspector: If it isn't enough, you must use 600 kg of manure per rai or 3,750 kg per hectare (Fieldnote, Sombat Na-ngam of Na Dee Village, Nong Pua Sub-District, Kemmarat District, December 17, 2007)*

Mr. Thieng Mai-ngam, another farmer from Non Bok Village, Trakanpeutpon Sub-district, Trakanpeutpon District, Ubon Ratchathani Province, was chosen as a sample for field inspection by an external inspector from IMO in 2007. When external inspector inspected his 64 rai of land, he found a pig farm. He stored partial chemically treated animal feed and the water for the pigs was unsanitary.

> *The external inspector: How much manure do you apply?*
> *Thieng: About nine tons for the whole year. I have no compost because I didn't make any. I haul the manure and put it directly on the fields.*
> *Finally, the external inspector recommended: If you are going to grow organic rice, you can't raise pigs in such a congested pen. The pig manure has no way to be properly evacuated. It makes it unsanitary and germs*

get everywhere. The trough for pig waste is rather narrow. And you still use industrial feed. If you are going to follow the Bio Suisse regulations, you can't crowd all the pigs in the same pen. You have to build a water conduit to make the pig manure collect in a proper, sanitary way. You can't give them industrial feed. You need to give them natural feed. If you give them industrial feed, the manure they produce can't be used on your organic rice fields.

The admonishments of the external inspector were a cause of anxiety for the farmers. Most farmers raised pigs, and they were afraid of violating regulations and given red cards. They were afraid of losing their one baht per kg savings deductions. Mr. Somchai Kriengkrai, a farmer from Na Sawan Village, Na Sawan Sub-district of Ubon Ratchathani Province, said that he had 70 rai. In 2008, he sold rice at 15,000 baht per ton, which was equivalent to the government's guaranteed price. The mandatory savings deduction meant that his saving in 2008 was 15,000 baht. In a conversation with the researcher, Somchai complained about the organic guaranteed price, but this paled in comparison to his anxiety about being red-carded for raising pigs on his farm. He would lose all his savings deduction, which amounted to several ten thousands of baht. Accumulated over the previous three years, this represented a very large sum to Somchai, and he risked losing all of it.

Somchai said that his pig farm was the investment of his son who worked outside the farm and left to his father to take care of them in his absence. The pigs were fed primarily the rice bran from their own farm, with occasional supplement by industrial feed. Then, I questioned can he feed the pigs broken rice or rice bran only, and can he avoid using industrial feed? Somchai replied that it's not worthwhile using rice to feed the pigs, as rice is very expensive and the pigs being fed by rice are not well grown compared to pigs that are industrial feed.

At any rate, the villagers will not say that they hide bags of industrial feed to raise pigs, as the regulations prohibit bags of both chemical fertilizer and industrial feed at the house or in the fields. The villagers view pig raising as having the advantage of producing manure for the rice fields. When the regulations prohibit the raising of pigs being fed by industrial foods and the use of pig manure, the villagers are not able to follow the regulations stringently. They are not able to admit or show this openly, which meant that there was ambiguity and awkwardness. This was also

felt by the project officers. Somchai told the researcher that his family worried about the regulations regarding pig raising. They were anxious about losing the thousands of baht they would lose if they were found in the wrong (Interview, Somchai Kriengkrai, November 26, 2008).

The facts of the savings deduction of several ten thousand baht and the money spent in hiring labor are extremely significant to the farmers. This was more important than the transport costs of several thousands of baht per year and other additional costs and expenses. If they lost their savings, it would be as if they lost all the benefits of practicing organic agriculture. The organic farmers of northeastern Thailand live a different culture from that of the West where international regulations are devised. Hence, I do agree with Mutersbaugh who argues that the international regulations are formed in developed countries, but these regulations are imposed on growers in developing countries and certification are performed by the inspectors who are not accustomed to the cultural settings of rural communities in which these rules are enforced. The gap between international expectations and domestic goals can create contradictions and conflicts in the process of certification (Mutersbaugh 2004).

The farmers themselves cannot make much sense of the intention of the regulations associated with animal well-being on organic farm, including interpretations of whether animals are being harmed or tortured. This lack of comprehension and different cultural background and lifestyle cause the farmers to not accept these stipulations. One farmer asked in the annual meeting of 2008, *"Does raising fighting cocks and fighting them constitute torture?"* (Cock fighting is a tradition of northeastern Thailand.) It was a sarcastic rebuttal to the international regulations associated with animal well-being, which elicited uproarious laughter from the other farmers. They felt their daily lives being controlled by an anonymous legislator. The animal welfare stipulations made them very wary and suspicious. They thought of them as part of the strategy to exploit the farmers, whereby the project trapped them into accepting these conditions by using the "blackmail" of the mandatory savings program (Observation, meeting of April 14, 2008).

This caused them to be increasingly dissatisfied. There was a spread of rumors regarding the illegitimacy of various aspects of the project. There were farmers who insinuated that more and more farmers would resign from the project if only they

were not afraid of losing their savings deduction. They said they had seen several farmers leave the project without being returned their savings. The case of Kaen Chaemsri of Na Sawan Village who practiced organic agriculture for over seven years but asked to leave the project because of an illness still had not received his savings money. The case of Kaen was a source of great discontent. He told me that he asked to leave and requested his savings money of over 10,000 baht returned. The officers told him that he would get his money back after an investigation. Two years after his resignation, he still had not seen one baht returned. Kaen said that he had debts to the project (from the premium fund) from the purchase of one cow. The balance owed him was a few thousand baht, but Kaen did not dispute it. He felt very sad that because of his illness, he could not work his 40 rai organic farm. He now grows eucalyptus and some non-organic rice, using hired labor for all activities (Interview, Kaen Chaemsri, August 20, 2008).

Moreover, the current methods used for accountability, with their over-emphasis on total transparency, standardization and performance indicators have been strongly criticized. The criticism is that the increasingly detailed paperwork frequently diverts the attention of the public sector away from actually improving real standards in an appropriate way. Moreover, detailed paperwork often conforms to contradictory targets and inappropriate measures of performance, rather than helpful and intelligent forms of accountability (Power 1996). Jaffee argues that the root of the problem of accountability in certification system is that the uncritical application of the Northern model of organic certification, with little understanding of the socio-economic and political contexts of producers in the South, constitutes "neo-colonialism". Jaffee argues that it is imperative that international organic standards be framed to better address the social, economic, and cultural context of these vulnerable growers. Moreover, no new requirements should be imposed on these growers without both solid justification and adequate financial compensation (Jaffee 2004).

6.3.2 Distrust in the Calculation Method Adopted by the Experts

As mentioned earlier, the farmers producing organic rice bear risk of lost of high transaction costs and production costs, they also bear marketing risk. The interviews with the farmers in 2008 reflected the fact that the farmers distrust in the calculation method adopted by the experts, due to errors undertaken by the experts in the estimation of yields. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, the experts play a critical role in controlling risk and quantity and quality of organic jasmine rice produced in organic rice scheme. Here, I demonstrate how the farmers question calculation method employed by the experts in ensuring the efficiency and accountability of the organic jasmine rice production system.

During field inspection, an internal inspector calculates planted areas to be used for growing jasmine rice by an individual farmer; this method allows an internal inspector to calculate annual yields produced by each farmer in the project. Then, external inspector can check and determine whether estimated yields produced by a particular farmer are close to actual yields. Moreover, the external inspector can compare the yields harvested in a current year to yields harvested in the previous year. However, the experts' attempt to control the quantity and quality of organic jasmine rice creates "unintended consequences" relating to error of calculation method used by them. These unintended consequences cause the farmers' distrust of the experts and the expert knowledge relating to certification and verification.

I will illustrate the way in which the experts adopt a calculation method in checking the annual yields they produce, the unintended consequences, and the way in which the farmers express their mistrust in the expert's calculation method. In the judgment of the external inspectors, excessively high or low estimated yields than real outputs are problems, as one explained in a field inspection on December 20, 2007:

> *Average yields of organic jasmine rice produced in study site in northeastern Thailand are estimated to be about 350 kg per rai (2.0 to 2.5 tons per hectare). If the farmers sell organic rice 10 to 15 percent over what was estimated, it is acceptable. If they sell organic rice 15 percent over what was estimated, it is not acceptable. Some farmers sell 200 percent over the estimated figure, so it is regarded as problem. In contrast, the internal inspector sometimes estimates yields lower than real*

outputs. Too high or too low estimated yields by the internal inspector are errors of the internal control system (ICS). In the cases where most real outputs are higher than estimated yields, it is possible for the farmers to sell the extra rice. Where do extra yields come from? In the cases where estimated yields are lower than real outputs, the farmers lose.

In theory, the estimated yields produced by farmers must be close to estimated yields calculated by the internal inspectors. If estimated yields are higher than real outputs, the experts are concerned that the farmers may be selling non-organic rice to the project. Almost all estimations of yields in the internal inspection in 2007 were higher than real outputs, but not all farmers who sell outputs over estimation are regarded as problem.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, the external inspector usually takes a random sample of the farmers, mixing between the farmers who are certified as organic, and those who are growing rice in the first and second year of transitional period. Additionally, the external inspector usually selects a sample of the farmers whose organic plots are connected to conventional plots, and those who are selling excessively low or high real outputs than what was estimated. Though the experts hold in their hands the complete authority to make judgments about error in the production system and in the internal control system, it is rather difficult for the external inspector to know whether or not the farmers have done anything in violation of the rules.

Accountability in the production system relies on the correspondence between paper reality and concrete reality. The gap between paper reality and concrete reality reflects the error; the error always leads to the dialogue among the farmers, the extension service officers, and the internal inspectors. During my observations of the field inspection in 2007, I found that though the real outputs of some farmers are higher than the estimated yields, it is not always considered as a problem by the experts.

I will raise two cases I found during my observations of the field inspections to illustrate the gap between paper reality and concrete reality, and the gap between international expectations and domestic goals which create unintended consequences. If the farmers can explain why extremely high yields from their organic plots are "reasonable", selling excessively high outputs is not a problem. But, if the farmers

cannot give a "good" reason for the excessive high real outputs, selling excessively high outputs is considered as a problem. However, what is judged as "reasonable" or not depends on the experts' judgments, but the negotiations of the farmers are also involved.

The first case is a farmer who owned about 60 rai (9.6 hectares) of land and sold about 16,000 kg (16 tons) of organic rice in the harvest year 2007/2008, though the yields estimated by the internal inspector were about 11,000 kg (11 tons). Since real outputs were excessive higher than estimated yields by roughly 5,000 kg (5 tons), this case was considered uncommon. Therefore, this case was selected as a sample by the external inspector for the field inspection in 2007.

In the following section, I will detail my observations of interactions between farmers and experts regarding the calculation methods adopted by the experts. What is happening is a considerable gap between estimated yields and real outputs being produced by the farmers. The argument about an accurate calculation of yields is important in the abstract systems, since it is a basic means through which the experts can determine the efficiency of the production system and the transparency of the experts to perform as professionals. A dialogue between the extension service officer, internal inspector, and external inspector in the field inspection of December 17, 2007 indicate vulnerability existing in the expert systems and a place of tension exists in the abstract system.

> *The inspector: Why do you produce yields over estimated yields?*
> *The farmer: The internal inspector estimated the outputs at about 274 kg per rai, but I produce real outputs over estimated yields.*
> *The external inspector: Do you sell extra rice produced outside the contract to the project?*
> *The farmer: I sell only rice which I harvested from my organic plots. I put a lot of livestock manure onto lands and grow rotation crops like green beans; therefore, soil fertility is greatly improved which has led to high yields (Observations in the field inspection of Sombat Sriwong at Ban Na Dee, Nong Phue sub-district, Khem Marat district, Ubon Ratchatani province, December 17, 2007).*

For the first case, the external inspector suggests the internal inspector to improve estimated yields for the next year to be higher than the estimated yields in the present year. Encountering the miscalculation of the internal inspector, the external

inspector tries to eliminate the error of the field inspection by suggesting the internal inspector correct his performance as an expert. It signifies that although the lay persons can make a mistake, the experts are always correct. It is worth noting that the first case which is illustrated above is considered not problematic, although the farmer sold real output over the estimated yield. The acceptable excessive real output is based on the supposition that the farmer handles only an organic plot.

In contrast, the second case is an example of a farmer who handles parallel crops. Though he does not sell high outputs, it is considered problematic. The farmer owned about 5 rai (0.8 hectare) of land and sold about 1.8 tons of organic rice in the harvest year 2007/2008, but the estimated yield in the same year was about 1.6 tons. Hence, the real output was higher than the estimated yield by roughly 0.2 tons, or 175 kg, which was over 10 percent higher than the estimated yield. I observed during the field inspection in 2007 interactions between by the external inspectors, the internal inspector, and the farmer as follows:

> *The external inspector: How many plots do you handle?*
> *The farmer: Two plots.*
> *The external inspector found only mapping of one plot. Hence, the farmer added that he also handled a shared cropping plot.*
> *The external inspector: Do you take two crops into the project?*
> *The farmer: I take only an organic rice plot into the project.*
> *The internal inspector: The shared cropping plot is not allowed to be taken into the project.*
> *The farmer admitted that he handles two rice plots. Yet, he puts chemical fertilizer onto the shared cropping plot, but he has never put chemical fertilizer onto the organic plot. Nevertheless, the inspector is worried about risk of contamination.*
> *The external inspector: Do you use chemical fertilizer?*
> *The farmer: Yes, I put a certain amount of chemical fertilizer onto the shared cropping plot. Because of this reply, it led to extensive discussions between the external inspector, the internal inspector, the extension service staff, and the farmer.*
> *The external inspector asked the internal inspector: Do you ensure that the farmer does not sell non-organic rice to the project? Where do the additional outputs come from?*
> *The farmer: I separate the warehousing of organic and non-organic rice.*
> *The internal inspector: The outputs are not high over the estimated yield and the farmer keeps the organic outputs at home.*
> *The external inspector: If the farmer managed parallel crops, he might have put chemical fertilizer onto the organic plot. And he might bring non-*

organic rice from the shared cropping to sell to the project. To investigate the risk of contamination, the external inspector checked the accuracy of the documents.
The external inspector asked the internal inspector: Does the internal inspector stay with the farmer all the time? Are you sure of whether or not the farmer put chemical fertilizer onto the organic plot?
The external inspector asked the farmer: If the farmer manages parallel crops, it is possible for the farmer to sell non-organic rice to the project. Why don't you grow organic rice in shared cropping crop instead?
The farmer: I cannot grow organic rice in the shared cropping crop because the land owner does not allow me to do so. The land owner does not want to grow organic rice because he is afraid that outputs will decrease.
The external inspector asked the farmer: Where do the inputs come from?
The farmer: The land owner provides chemical fertilizer and other production inputs. I provide only labor.
The external inspector asked the farmer: Have you ever put chemical fertilizer onto the organic plot?
The farmer: I never use chemical fertilizer in the organic plot since the land owner does not allow me to do so.
The external inspector asked the farmer: Do you secretly put chemical fertilizer onto the organic plot?
The farmer: No.
The external inspector asked the internal inspector: Do you often find farmers managing parallel crops?
The internal inspector: I find that the farmers grow organic jasmine rice for sale, and grow glutinous rice for consumption.
The external inspector asked the farmer: Where do the extra organic outputs come from?
The internal inspector: I send twenty sacks to use for containing organic rice. It is impossible for the farmer to sell organic rice over the estimated yield.
The external inspector suggested the internal inspector improve the internal control system to prevent the problem of contamination: Because the farmer does not control the management of the shared cropping plot, he just manages the other's land. If this situation happens, I suggest some measures to be undertaken. The project should make an extra agreement with the farmer to ensure that the farmers do not use inputs from outside in the organic plots and do not sell non-organic rice to the project. (Observations in the field inspection of Kampa Kamma at Sansuk village, Lau sub-district, Pratumratwongsa district, Amnartcharoern province, 2007).

As I mentioned earlier, calculation is a technology of power employed by the inspectors to control the accountability of the organic rice production system and the internal control system. Through the calculation of yields to be harvested by a

particular farmer on a certain amount of land, the experts can determine the efficiency of rice production. If yield estimation is correct, estimated yields should be close to real outputs. Thus, it could prevent error caused by the farmer selling outputs outside the contract, or mistake caused by the farmer selling extra non-organic outputs to the project. The two examples illustrated above show the farmers' distrust of calculation method adopted by the experts, because the error of internal inspectors has negatively affected the farmers.

6.4 Manipulation of Scheme Rules

6.4.1 Diversification of Rice Crops

The project experts indicate high potential risk of contamination if the farmers manage parallel crops, so international regulations are enforced on the farmers to conduct daily farming practices[61]. From the point of view of the project experts, the farmer who handles parallel crops is a source of vulnerability for organic certification. However, it is not easy for the project experts to know whether the farmers manage parallel crops. I argue that the diversification of rice crops is a practice of politics used by the farmers against the attempt to create a unit of production under the control of capitalists. The enforcement of regulations on the farmers gives the project the authority to monitor and control the quantity and quality of organic rice to be grown by an individual farmer within a particular year. Yet, the effective of enforcement of these rules depends upon the fact that the farmers must inform the project accurately, not tell a lie. The project experts told the farmers that if the farmers are interviewed by an external inspector during field inspection, the farmers need to think carefully how to answer the question in such a way to be good for themselves and the project (Observation, a training for organic farmers in the second year of the transitional period on March 26, 2008).

[61] These regulations are: (i) the farmers must inform the project about a total number of rice plots managed by them, (ii) a complete conversion to organic agriculture in all crops is needed, (iii) the farmers are not allowed to manage parallel crops, (iv) the farmers must change organic rice seeds every year, (v) modification of rice seeds must be approved by the project in advance, (vi) modification of planted areas to be used for growing organic rice is not allowed without permission from the project, (vii) mapping of rice crops managed by an individual farmer must be up-to- date and must be approved by the internal inspectors.

In such meeting, the project expert was referring to a farmer who was inspected in 2008 and had told the external inspector that he managed parallel crops (see 6.4.2). The field inspection is an entry point to the global niche markets. At the same time, it is a source of vulnerability and a place of conflict between lay actors and professional expertise. The internal inspectors visit the farmers who are chosen as samples of field inspection before the arrival of the external inspector. The external inspector is a third-party certifier working on contract with the certifying agency. He or she comes to check whether or not the operations of the farmers and the internal control system comply with the regulations. Field inspection is undertaken on the basis of correspondence between document management and field inspection.

In document management, the farmers were thought to fill out forms during the lecture portion which takes roughly a day and in a subsequent inspection. Complete documents are important in organic certification since certification depends considerably on documents. As a Mexican fair trade farmer says, "Organic coffee is documents. Without documents, the work in the fields has no meaning" (Mutersbaugh 2004). This study confirms the importance of document management in organic certification, as Thai farmer remarked, "Practicing organic agriculture without documents is not genuine organic agriculture; it is the same as a student who claims that he or she has passed an examination without a certificate".

Despite the intention to control documents in relation to the monitoring of farming practices, the attempt to standardize organic agriculture is far from complete. The author's survey in 2007 finds that some farmers do indeed handle parallel crops but do not inform the project of this. If a farmer owns more than one plot, it is not uncommon to find them doing conventional agriculture in one plot and organic agriculture in other plots. The author's survey also finds mixing of jasmine rice and other types of rice. The farmers grow various types of rice to serve multiple purposes[62]. The diversification of rice crops is a coping strategy employed by northeastern Thai farmers against the contract production which try to turn them into laborers working on their own land. Moreover, it is a strategy that helps them create

[62] For instance, red sticky rice is grown for ceremonies, white sticky rice is grown for home consumption, white rice is grown for gifts to cousins, and organic jasmine rice is grown for commercial sale.

flexibility. For the farmers, to grow a variety of crops means having more options and having market certainty, so farmers can reduce the risk of loss from reliance upon the organic rice market alone.

As mentioned earlier, organic rice farming is high rent and high risk, the farmers are thus reluctant to switch completely to organic agriculture. The low yields cultivated from organic plots in the first and second year of the transitional period is important to understand why farmers diversify rice crops. Some northeastern Thai farmers tell that they lose half of their output from organic plots in the first year of transition to organic agriculture. For this reason, a mixture of conventional and organic agriculture helps them to reduce risk of lost from organic agriculture.

Additionally, diversification of rice crops is beneficial for the farmers in term of labor management and animal husbandry. Peasant insistence on diversification of rice crops is important in understanding the complexity of the labor process and physical space management in relation to farming practices. The variety of rice means that all crops do not mature at the same time. This gives farmers greater flexibility to manage labor to work on their farms. The transplanting time of glutinous rice usually begins earlier than that of jasmine rice. Accordingly, the harvest time of glutinous rice comes earlier than the harvest time of jasmine rice. The households can rely on family labor to cope with routine farming practices. Thus, diversification of rice crops helps the farmers to reduce a reliance on wage labor and decreases production costs.

Moreover, diversification of rice crops is helpful in terms of animal husbandry. Since the manure of buffalos and cows is needed in organic agriculture, the farmers have to keep buffalos or cows within their farms and have to manage the physical space for animal husbandry. If all the land is utilized for growing organic jasmine rice, there is no available land for animal husbandry during the early stage of transplanting season until the end of harvesting season. The poor farmers who have limited land and grow only organic jasmine rice cannot avoid a difficulty associated with a lack of land for animal husbandry. Yet, the farmers who grow a variety of rice are more flexible. When they grow glutinous rice in one plot, their animals can be kept in other plots which are reserved for growing jasmine rice. Moreover, as glutinous rice matures before organic jasmine rice, after harvest, the glutinous rice land can be used for animal husbandry.

The other reason is that smallholders grow rice in the shared cropping system. This study finds that the poor depend more on a shared cropping system compared to the wealthy farmers. There are several reasons underlying the persistence of shared cropping system in northeastern Thailand. The problem of insufficient land is common among the poor. Because of the desire to seek additional land, the poor farmers need to work within the shared cropping system. The shared cropping system can fulfill the demand for land among the poor and the demand for labor among the rich. In the shared cropping system, land owners have the authority to make decisions about types of rice and farming methods. The land owners prefer conventional agriculture for the reason that it does not demand intensive labor and generates high yields. In the shared cropping system, rental farmers have no alternative, unless they grow non-organic rice to maximize yields. Yet, management of parallel crops is strictly prohibited. Therefore, the poor farmers are forced to choose either only practicing organic rice or management of shared cropping system which is risk to be forced to quit from the project.

6.4.2 Modification of Rice Farming Practices

Modification of rice farming practices is another practice of politics employed by the farmers in response to the attempt to transform traditional agriculture towards standardized organic agriculture. Organic agriculture is based on the utilization of scientific knowledge. The knowledge adopted in organic agriculture is made to be fixed and is attached to international regulations. The farmers who shift from conventional to organic agriculture have to forget traditional agricultural practices and must re-learn how to farm in an environmental friendliness (Morgan 2000). How are such changes in agricultural knowledge and practices perceived by northeastern Thai farmers? How do northeastern Thai farmers integrate local knowledge and scientific knowledge into the everyday life practices of the organic jasmine rice scheme?

Improvement of soil fertility is one important feature of the principles of sustainable agriculture, such as the use of cover crops, rotation crops,[63] and organic

[63] Cover and rotation crops are annual plants that are not grown for cultivation, but are grown to fill gaps in either time or space when cash crops would leave the ground uncovered.

compost. It is claimed that these methods help increase moisture retention, control weeds, and are useful for pest management. For cover cropping to work in organic systems, land is required to be left fallow for at least four months of the year. Despite the best intentions of nurturing soil fertility, the farmers find it difficult to follow such a rule. The export-oriented organic jasmine rice scheme requires the farmers to grow rotation crops before rice cropping. The farmers are required to buy bean seeds to be used for a rotation crop at the price 40 baht ($US 1) per kg. If the farmers grow rotation crops to cover all their land, the cost is fairly high. Despite the high cost of rotation crops, difficulties of compliance with international standards come from a lack of water supply and irrigation systems. The farmers consider the cost of rotation crops as reducing their incomes derived from rice sales. As such, the farmers prefer leaving the land after harvest or reducing the areas to be used for rotation cropping. They might not grow rotation crops altogether (see details in Chapter Five).

Organic compost is also an important element of organic agriculture. It recycles agricultural waste back into the system. In an ideal system, organic compost is comprised of crop residues, livestock manure, indigenous micro-organisms, and organic household waste. It is supposed to be "cooked" to a certain degree in order to stabilize nutrients, neutralize pesticide residues, and kill weed seeds and pathogens. In practice, the farmers rarely meet the ideals of on-farm composting. A large number of farms integrate animal manure into their organic plots because the farmers have the livestock, especially the manure of buffalos and cows. However, the farmers prefer to use "raw" animal manure without "cooking" it because organic composting requires materials, water, intensive labor, and is time-consuming. The requirement of international regulations prioritizes the use of the manure of buffalos and cows. However, the farmers find some difficulties associated with the requirement to use animal manure (see details in Chapter Five). Therefore, some farmers buy organic compost which is not certified, and in most cases compost is made from animal manure which has been fed by non-organic grain and might be treated with antibiotics. This practice is prohibited by regulations in relation to organic agriculture.

What follows are case studies of farmers who did not adhere to the organic jasmine rice production instructions. Yet they combine local and scientific knowledge into hybrid agricultural practices. The first case study is of Ms. Samorn Romsai of the

village of Ban Na Pang, Huay Sub-district, Patumrachawongsa District, Amnat Charoen Province. She recounted that during the soil preparation process and caring for the young seedlings, the villagers were recommended to spray liquid compost fertilizer on the seedlings to give strength and endurance against pests. The making and spraying of the liquid fertilizer was labor intensive and time-consuming. Many villagers did not do it. Those who did not follow the instructions did not use the spray method but use other methods that they thought of themselves. For example, after bottling the liquid fertilizer, they poked holes in the bottle to allow the fertilizer to flow out and disperse on its own. However, it did not reach the top or leaves of the seedlings. Some people saw this method as ineffective as the plant draws food from its leaves. Samorn used both methods—sprinkling and pouring.

In addition, Samorn did not transplant according to the guidelines that specified transplanting 20 centimeters apart or four seedlings per arm's length. She planted them far apart because she found organic rice seedlings difficult to pull out otherwise. The cost of hiring help to do so was expensive. If she transplanted three seedlings per hole it would lead to waste, so she planted two per hole. When she planted at wider intervals, at one transplant per 50 centimeters—which she called "transplanting to conserve seedlings"—Samorn found that the rice separated and yielded ten grains per stalk. The rice grains were large and of good weight.

I asked her where she learned the knowledge to adapt for use in her production system because I wanted to know why villagers did not simply use either the scientific knowledge of organic rice production or folk knowledge. It was interesting that Samorn used the method of observing her own sister and other neighbors who planted organic paddy, transplanting three to four seedlings per hole and at frequent intervals. Samorn found that her sister's paddy produced a lot of straw, the grains were small, and each plant produced many grains that did not grow to full maturity. Samorn's sister plants produced more grains but the grains were lightweight. So Samorn concluded that her method of transplanting resulted in higher yields. Even though she produced less grain, her grains were heavier. The quality of the produce thus depended on the care and attention given to the seedlings to ensure premium grade (Interview, Samorn, January 19, 2008).

6.4.3 Hidden Rice Selling

Hidden rice selling is another practice of politic employed by the farmers as a strategic negotiation to the capitalist production, as one farmer told the researcher:

> *The farmers are given rice sacks to contain organic rice equivalent to amount of estimated yields calculated by the internal inspectors. Sometimes the farmers harvest real outputs less than estimated yields, hence, they surreptitiously add more rice to sell to the project so that it is equivalent to estimated yields. The farmers call this action "stealing sale rice". The farmers might buy non-organic rice at 11 baht per one kg and sell it to the project at 14 baht per one kg. So they can make more profit from selling extra rice. They cannot tell the difference between organic rice and non-organic rice just by looking at the outside. If the farmers do not sell rice more than the estimated yields, the project might not recognize whether the rice being sold to the project is organic or no (Interview Somkid, Na Sawan sub-district, Kemmarat distrct, Ubon Ratchatani province, 23 March, 2008).*

When the organic rice price is lower than the non-organic rice price and when the farmers cultivate more organic rice than estimated, farmers surreptitiously sell a portion of organic rice to the merchants in local markets. They also call this behavior "hidden rice selling" (*"Kamoy Kai Kaw"*). The situation of lower organic rice price and the deductions for contamination are the reasons why the farmers deem it not worthwhile selling organic rice to the project. As one farmer remarked:

> *The farmers who grow organic rice constantly harvest relatively lower yields than those who grow non-organic rice. Consequently, we think about how to have enough money to make a living and repay debts. In the cultivation years when I harvest relatively lower yields than estimated, I buy non-organic rice from others to sell to the project. I just do what others do. I do not blame others, others do not blame me. We do not make ourselves feel ashamed in public by complaining that we lied to each other (Interview Somkid, Na Sawan sub-district, Kemmarat distrct, Ubon Ratchatani province, 23 March, 2008).*

In the perspective of farmers, they do not consider the act of selling rice outside the contract immoral, though it is against regulations. The farmers explain that within the same proportion of land they harvest relatively low outputs compared to farmers who practice conventional agriculture. Hence, the farmers consider selling

rice outside the contract as a compensation for the decreased yields and increasing costs paid by them in the organic agriculture. When the farmers who grow organic rice find their neighbors selling organic rice outside the contract, they do not blame them for such behavior.

My observation at the field sites in the cultivated year of 2007/2008 that the organic rice price sold to the project was lower than the non-organic rice price sold to local markets. The organic farmers were thus dissatisfied with the requirement to sell total output to the project and said that they would like to sell a portion of their output on the local market. The farmers also say that in the past they would keep rice within the granary and would store the rice until the price increased in April. However, the farmers produced under the contract are not allowed to do so because the project specified to sell organic rice in early December to mid-January.

In the cultivation year 2008/2009, the non-organic rice price sold in local markets was very high. The farmers did not sell all of their organic rice on the local markets but sold a portion of organic rice to the project. I asked a farmer, "Why do you not sell almost all of your harvest outside the contract to maximize the profit?" The farmer's answer reflects on the situational ethics: "Although we sell rice to merchants in local markets, we must sell a portion of our rice to the project. We sympathize with the project and fear they will not have sufficient rice for export. Though the project allows the farmers to sell rice outside the contract on the condition that we have to inform the project in advance, it does not much benefit the farmers because the yields cultivated in organic agriculture are relatively low compared to those of conventional agriculture. So after selling rice to the project, the farmers usually do not have any rice left to sell on the local markets".

I argue that the sale of rice outside the contract is an effective strategy of contestation in one sense. This can be seen from the fact that the "stealing" of sales rice is done at the same time that rumors are spread of many organic farmers threatening to leave the project. These rumors and criticism led to the project increasing the organic rice price to 15 baht per kg or 15,000 baht per ton for the first time in the cultivation year 2009/2010. This was equivalent to the non-organic rice price on the local market. Even more importantly, there were constant rumors that the farmers would not sell their rice if the savings deduction of one baht per kg continued.

The project, for the first time, conceded to their demand and did not make the deduction in the cultivation year 2009/2010. So the farmers sold their rice to the project. If the farmers had boycotted the project, it would have had serious repercussions as the project would not be able to meet its output obligations for the international market. The demand of the farmers demonstrated that they would not tolerate a lower-than-market price in the future. This indicated that the contestation by farmers was undermined the regulatory framework that they saw as unfair, and was one method of getting results at one level (Footnote, 10 January 2009).

6.4.4 Harvest the Crops in Ways that Maximize Their Wages: Politics of Practices by Laotian Labour

Harvesting the crops in ways that maximize their wages is a practice of politics employed by the Laotian laborers under contract production. Laotian laborers reported that they know that they always get lower wages than do Thai laborers. They usually get paid piece rates rather than per day. Meanwhile, Thai laborers always get paid per day and receive higher pay. For example, Thai laborers are paid 200 baht per day to work the rice harvest while Laotian laborers get paid 100 baht per day. And, Laotian laborers are paid 1.30 baht per bundle while Thai laborers are paid 1.50 to 2 baht per bundle. The reason given to explain why Laotain laborers wish to continue to work on the Thai side although they are lower paid is that Thai farm owners pay for their transportation, immigration fee and meals. They said they felt sympathy for Thai farm owners since they saw that they often met with poor yields for their work. In addition, they found it more difficult to find work in Laos, and when they did find work their wages were lower than on the Thai side.

In Laos, there were no more farming jobs, as farming was for subsistence only. Laotian farmers only hire laborers to work their farms when they are unable finish their work by using their family laborers. When Laotian farmers finish their rice harvest, they usually only grow vegetable gardens for sustenance. The Laotians said that the sweet sticky rice planted in Suwannakhet can be harvested more quickly than rice farming in Thai side. Thus, they can work in this area first before moving on to work on Thai farms. Rice farming in Laos uses both synthetic and organic fertilizer.

Chemical fertilizer was expensive at 1,500 baht per sack and did not seem to effectively nurture the rice plants. Laotian farmers do not have much land themselves, on average only ten rai per family. Thus, when they finish planting or harvesting their farms, they travel to Thailand to work. Since the labor required in Laos is not high, Laotians can migrate to work as seasonal migrant laborers in Thailand.

The Laotian interviewees reported that they started working in the early morning and did not stop until the late evening. If they feel hungry they can walk to get something to eat or wait the Thai farm owners call them to come to eat. But they do not often take long rest breaks, sitting under trees occasionally. Laotian laborers work hard since they want to get more money and return home early. However, Laotians were often known to work quickly but not as effectively. Some Thai farmers complained that the Laotians were not careful when they work. They always harvest the crops in ways that maximize their wages. They often drop spikes while cutting; they always cut longer rice plants which makes more straw when the rice is milled. They usually bind smaller bunches of spikes than do Thai laborers. Two bunches of spikes made by Laotian laborer is equal to one bunch made by Thai laborers. Regarding the aforementioned comment on Laotian laborer behavior, a likely interpretation is that it their way as seasonal contract laborers in the Thai farms to resist exploitation. Getting the work done in the shortest time without caring for the interests of employers or the extent of potential loss is a way of taking advantage of the piece-rate system (Interviews, Laotian laborers, September 23, 2008)

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter tries to understand the ways in which northeastern Thai farmers respond to the emergence of regulations and contractual relations in organic and fair trade rice production system. Various strategies adopted by organic farmers represent practices of politics to negotiate with development experts and capitalists in export-oriented organic rice production. First, some northeastern Thai farmers who are incorporated into the export-oriented fair trade and organic rice scheme adopt various strategies to create negotiating spaces. Doubts about the standardization of the organic rice production system reflect peasant mistrust in the certification system, and

monitoring and auditing of the experts. Dialogues and contestations between the farmers and the experts concerning issues of rice seeds, risk management, and estimated yields point to areas of contingency and vulnerability in production and certification processes. The farmers problematize the standardization of organic rice seeds sold to them; this can be seen as a practice of politics by farmers to the standardization and the purported accuracy of the experts.

In addition, northeastern Thai farmers use diversification of rice crops to resist the attempt to transform agricultural practices to fit with the ideals of organic agriculture and virtual capitalism. The farmers use a shared cropping system and diversification of rice crops as negotiating spaces to diversify their livelihoods. Diversification of rice crops allows the farmers to make more profits from the rise of niche markets for organic and fair trade, and at the same time it allows them to avoid the risk of loss incurred by relying on the organic rice production only. This study argues that diversification of rice crops allows the farmers to have more options and to increase their incomes. Moreover, diversification of rice crops is beneficial for the farmers in terms of labor management and animal husbandry.

Moreover, distrust in expert judgments about risks of contamination is a practice of politics employed by northeastern Thai farmers. The farmers problematize the experts' judgment about contamination risk and point out the vulnerability of organic certification and the mistake of experts. The vulnerability of organic certification is seen in the inconsistency of enforcement of regulations in all contexts. Although verification and certification are claimed to be universally applicable, in fact these procedures are context specific. In addition, judgment about contamination risks rests on the authority of the experts, while farmers have no bargaining power. The hidden use of chemical fertilizer can be seen as a tactic used by the farmers in response to domination based on the creation of spaces of purification and exclusion. The clandestine behaviors relating to hidden rice selling is a direct challenge to the verification and certification procedures and experts' authority. The enforcement of regulations on the farmers creates new burdens for them. The obligation of new requirements such as leveling the paddy fields, growing life-barrier trees, or blocking public waterways creates new conflicts between the farmers and their neighbors. As a result, the farmers are reluctant to follow the requirements, and they are occasionally

unable to comply with these regulations because of objections from their neighbors. It is imperative that international organic standards better address the social, economic, and cultural context of these vulnerable producers. Moreover, no new requirements should be imposed on these farmers without solid justification and adequate financial compensation. For example, the requirement to certify organic subsistence plots managed by the organic farmers should be dismissed, unless Northern consumers subsidize the full cost of this change.

Additionally, the farmers' distrust in the calculation method adopted by the experts is a practice of politics employed by northeastern Thai farmers to question the efficiency and accountability of the calculation methods used in the organic jasmine rice production. Calculation is a principal device employed by the experts to control the efficiency and accountability of organic rice production. Error occurring in the calculation of yields by the experts is a point of vulnerability and a source of contestation between the farmers and experts. The emergence of a new accountability culture and the current methods used for accountability, with their over-emphasis on total transparency, standardization, and performance indicators are strongly criticized by the farmers. The detailed paperwork and forms of accountability creates unintended consequences and new conflicts within local communities of the Northeast. This study confirms Power's argument that what counts as reasonable procedure is grounded in a practitioner consensus between lay producers and the experts in which tasks and routines are given meaning within wider operational frameworks (Power 1997).

Finally, the practice so-called "stealing sales rice" is a practice of politics employed by the farmers. When organic rice price appears to be lower than the non-organic rice price, northeastern Thai farmers conceal a portion of their organic rice, selling it to the merchants in local markets. The farmers argue that the selling of rice outside the contract is a compensation for their loss of yields and their risk of loss from contamination and deductions in income. The concealed selling rice by the farmers and the manipulation of scheme rules are adopted to create negotiating space within the capitalist production.

In summary, I argue that various strategies adopted by the farmers are the practices of politics to create negotiating spaces within organic rice production system

in order to gain more profits and reduce tensions and conflicts emerged in the processes of standardization and certification. The farmers question the legitimacy of standardization and certification of organic jasmine rice production and of the authority of the experts, but they have no intention to undermine the sustainable agriculture and sustainability of niche markets. However, it is fairly difficulty to determine the degree to which the adoption of these practices of politics can create tensions with scheme management and threaten accumulation and profitability.