

The Asian Reporter

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Edible insects a boon to Thailand's farmers



Poachers threaten lesser-known animals

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Man with piercings denied entry to Dubai

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Instant noodles: Friend or foe?

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CRISPY CRITTERS. Boontham Puthachat (not seen), 47, holds a two-month-old cricket he's raising at his farm in Thanon Nang Klarn village in Nakhon Ratchasima province, northeastern Thailand. Boontham's family is one of 30 in his village raising mounds of the profitable crisp and crunchy critters in their backyards, satisfying a big domestic appetite for edible insects, and a slowly emerging international one in countries where most diners would rather starve than sample fried grasshoppers or omelets studded with red ant eggs. (AP Photo/Apichart Weerawong)

By Denis D. Gray
The Associated Press

THANON NANG KLARN, Thailand — Depending solely on the rains to either yield a good rice crop or leave their fields dry and barren, farmers in the village of Thanon Nang Klarn in northeastern Thailand, the country's poorest region, led a precarious and backbreaking existence. Then they discovered bugs.

At Boontham Puthachat's home, six concrete pens seethe with crickets munching on chicken feed, pumpkins, and other vegetables — treats to fatten them before they are harvested and sold to hungry humans increasingly eager for a different type of dining experience.

"We haven't become rich, but now we have enough to better take care of our families," Boontham says proudly. "We are self-sufficient."

Boontham's family is one of 30 in the village raising mounds of the profitable crisp and crunchy critters in their backyards, satisfying a big domestic appetite for edible insects, and a slowly emerging international one in countries where most diners would rather starve than sample fried grasshoppers or omelets studded with red ant eggs.

Replicated across the country, these enterprises have spawned a multimillion-dollar industry with more than 20,000 registered farms, most of them small-scale

household operations, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Averaging an annual output of 7,500 tons in recent years, Thailand leads the world in producing insects for the dining table.

While it may still seem exotic, if not outright repulsive, to many in the western world, the FAO points out that insects have long been an integral part of human diets in nearly 100 countries, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with more than 1,600 species consumed.

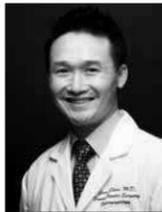
In China, the use of insects for food and medicine goes back more than 5,000 years. In recent times, cockroach farming has

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