

Demand for Thai Silk in International Market on the Rise (24/4/2014)

Sericulture in Thailand has continued to grow steadily, as demand for Thai silk in the international market is on the rise.

The Director-General of the Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Mr. Anant Suwannarat, said that Thai silk products in the United States, Japan, and European countries are still in great demand, while some countries in the Middle East, such as Oman, are starting to pay more attention to Thai silk for use in decoration.

Sericulture involves silkworm raising, mulberry production, and the silk industry. The market value of Thai silk is now about six billion baht a year. Although demand for Thai silk remains high, the area for silk farming is on the decline. In the past, silk farming covered 400,000 rai, or 160,000 acres, of land. Today, the area for silkworm raising and mulberry production has dropped to only 100,000 rai, or 40,000 acres.

Traditionally, sericulture has been a secondary occupation among farm households in Thailand, as their major focus is rice cultivation. In order to cope with the growing demand for Thai silk products in both local and foreign markets, officials have accelerated the expansion of silk farming in the northern region.

Thai silk exports earned the country more than 600 million baht in 2012. They are likely to increase, especially hand-woven cloth, which is gaining popularity abroad. Major markets include the United States, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom, and France.

Thai silk is one of Thailand's best-known handicrafts, found not only in numerous local shops but also throughout the world. It is also among the most popular products under the "One Tambon, One Product, or OTOP, program. Local silk makers have accumulated knowledge, skills, and expertise, which will help boost Thailand's economy, thanks to the wisdom that has been passed on from generation to generation.

Although the evidence of Thai sericulture cannot be traced as far back as in China, Thai people in all parts of the country have been weaving their own textiles for generations. Sericulture was developed and promoted in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), who established a Department of Sericulture more than a century ago.

Silk weaving is practiced in every region and there are a number of silk companies in and around Bangkok, but the Northeast is still the main production center.

Thai silk, with its creative designs, has made a name for Thailand in the international market. ASEAN countries have discussed cooperation in silk development in order to deal with greater competition in the world market. In this regard, Thailand is set to become the ASEAN silk hub, and it will play a vital role in helping develop the silk industry in this region.