

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A BURMESE WOMAN FARMER AND AS AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY IN THAILAND

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During my college years as a physics major in Yangon, Burma, my uncle was working at a fresh water prawn hatchery and prawn farms outside the city. His work there continued after I took a job as a school teacher at an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. I found aquaculture very interesting as we are producing food and so in general there is not so much need to worry about the market. There are so many roles in aquaculture to play and you must have a variety of qualities in order to be successful. For example, both technical and financial management, finding markets, etc. My other priority is that I want to create jobs for people.

My first effort was to establish an aquaculture supply shop in Yangon. My uncle would take orders for equipment and supplies and I would purchase in Thailand and ship to him. We eventually opened a small retail shop as well. My main interest after that has been in crab farming. I took a course from SEAFDEC in the Philippines and then decided to set up my own soft shell crab farm. So I gave up my life style in Bangkok including my career as a teacher, then started a new life as a soft shell crab farmer. The most lucrative market for crab farming is the production of soft shell crabs which are held in individual cages and examined every for 4 hours for molting. Within four hours of molting the crabs must be moved from saltwater to fresh water to keep the new shell soft. The crabs must be fed every other day with small forage fish.

The farm I purchased had been a shrimp pond and allowed to run down by the previous owner. I had to put in many long hours and cash to bring it back to production. After I trained a staff and developed a regular market I decided to diversify with other crab products including live horse shoe crabs, live mud crabs, crab meat, spanner crabs and eventually live groupers. Later I bought my neighbor farms and started another farm for poly-culture of red tilapia and white shrimp and a second soft shell crab farm. I will talk about what are the challenges I face as a young women including:

- Finding markets
- Supplies
- Staff management
- Technical management of the farms
- Racial discrimination

Finally, I will discuss how I cope with all these problems and challenges. Also we can discuss my extracurricular work at a local school, my adopted sons, and international volunteer work.