

Single seeding method boosts rice yields

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The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) Extension Project, which aims to grow rice using single seeding techniques, has increased rice yields for Lao farming families.

The project's steering committee met with relevant agencies yesterday at a two-day workshop in Vientiane to share information and experience and to oversee and provide guidance for the implementation of the project.

A model farmer, Mr Ting Xaysouk, from Phatthana village, Naxaithong district, Vientiane, told *Vientiane Times* that the system provides higher yields than traditional methods, but requires more effort in the early stages of planting, as well in weeding and water and soil management.

"If we use this system on good land, it can provide 40-50 stalks per seed and 6-8 tonnes of rice per hectare. During the first year farmers should get advice from agriculture technicians or project staff members," he said.

"In the last wet season I planted about 3,200 square meters of rice using the SRI system and I received higher rice yields than I ever did using traditional methods."

The project officially started in December 2007 when a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Department of Irrigation and Pro-net 21, a non-profit Japanese youth organisation which aims to alleviate various problems in developing countries, said a representative of Pro-net 21,

Mr Yusaku Toya.

The objective of the project is to improve the livelihoods of poor people in Laos by increasing rice yields through adoption of the SRI method.

Mr Toya said trials of the system began in three areas, including Tha Ngone in Lardkhoy village, Xathany district, Vientiane, and the two northern community managed irrigation sector subprojects of Houy Yang Noi in Paklai district, Xayaboury province, and Nam Pa in Luang Prabang

SRI have been confirmed once farmers accept the system, Mr Toya said.

He said now was not the time to argue the merits or disadvantages of the system, but to think about how to expand the scheme nationwide.

"We cannot force farmers to adopt the system at their own risk, but by demonstrating that the system works we find farmers become interested," he said.

"Through the past four crop seasons using SRI from 2006-



Mr Yusaku Toya (left) speaks at the meeting in Vientiane yesterday.

district, Luang Prabang province.

Since the 2006-07 dry season, trial areas of 13 plots with a total area of 0.7 hectares have increased to 42 ha for 101 households in the 2008-09 dry season. The planned expansion area in five provinces will amount to 1,270 ha for 4,168 households.

Even though there have been some disappointing harvest results in some areas, the benefits and advantages of

07, we have learnt a lot," said Deputy Director General of the Department of Irrigation, Mr Thanouxay Ounthuang, during the opening of the meeting yesterday.

"In general we can say that we've had good responses from people using our system, but we have also recognised the need for information sharing and better collaboration among the agencies involved to expand the system nationwide," he said.