

## **Article on ALRAC 2016**

### **Khao Kitchakood Agricultural Cooperative**

The ASEAN Economic Community established in 2015 was a major milestone in the regional economic integration agenda in ASEAN. One of the important areas of action under the Food, Agriculture and Forestry of the AEC Blueprint is to promote ASEAN Agricultural Cooperatives as a way of empowering and enhancing market access for the benefit of farmers in the region. The farmers especially smallholder farmers has indeed benefited from the AEC Blueprint and the evidence is clear when the ASEAN Farmers' Organisations Support Programme (AFOSP), in partnership with PROCASUR brought together leaders of the ASEAN Farmers' Organisations and the members of the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Agricultural Cooperatives (ASWGAC) to participate in the ASEAN Learning Route on Agricultural Cooperatives (ALRAC). The ASEAN Learning Route that took place in both the Philippines and Thailand from 28 March 2016 – 3 April 2016 had the ultimate objective of strengthening the role of agricultural cooperatives in addressing the challenges and opportunities of AEC by learning and gaining knowledge about the best practices in agricultural cooperatives management in the Philippines and Thailand.

One of the important sessions held during event was the field visits to the cooperatives in both the Philippines and Thailand. The article will particularly focus on the experiences of the participants during their field visit to the Khao Kitchakood Agricultural Cooperative in Thailand. In general, the participants definitely learnt a lot from their visit and definitely acquired lots of new knowledge. In terms of the management of Khao Kitchakood Agricultural Cooperative, the participants observed that the cooperative definitely had clear visions and objectives as well as good governance structure in accordance with Thailand's cooperative national law. In addition, the participants also felt that the cooperative had a highly professional management team with specialized staff as well as a good working environment that promoted teamwork. Besides that, participants also found out that the cooperative had the capacity to easily access financial and non-financial support from government institutions though loans and other non-financial channels. One of the key successes of the cooperative observed by the participants is their good regulatory framework as well as their well-defined business development plans. In terms of networking, the participants found out that the Khao Kitchakood Cooperative definitely understands the importance of networking with other cooperatives and it was essential for their growth.

The participants also managed to learn about the development of the cross-country marketing strategies of the cooperative as well as look into their agreements that involved public and private sectors. The participants noted that The Khao Kitchakood Cooperative could easily be engaged with other private marketing cooperation and also build partnerships with other large traders. The participants also felt that existing and building new partnership between agricultural cooperatives and private sector facilitated the growth of the Khao Kitchakood Cooperative as a whole. The cooperative also works closely with farmers and with the support of the cooperative

these farmers are involved in the complete value chain so that high quality, organic and safe products could be placed in the domestic and international markets. In addition to farmers, the cooperative also works together with government institutions as they are an important ally that provides market information on products whereas the local governments support the cooperatives in accessing new markets. In looking at the public policies and national legal framework in relation to Thailand's cooperative movement, participants learnt that the cooperatives receives endorsement from the royal kingdom. In addition to that, programmes related to the theme of agriculture are often supported strongly by the government. Besides that, cooperatives in Thailand are also supported financially through subsidies and other incentives which definitely proves that the support for cooperatives on Thailand is definitely high.

Indeed the participants definitely learnt a whole lot through their field visit to The Khao Kitchakood Cooperative. They gained knowledge about the management of the cooperatives, the partnerships enhanced by the cooperatives and had a glimpsed of the overall support that the cooperatives in Thailand actually get from the royal kingdom as well as from the government. The field visit was definitely an important part of the ASEAN Learning Route on Agricultural Cooperatives (ALRAC) Program. As for this year's learning series, the 2017 ASEAN Learning Series and Policy Engagement on Agricultural Cooperatives (ALSPEAC) will be held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on 19 – 21 July 2017. The three-day event that is specifically designed as a learning exchange on the inclusive coffee value chain is expected to encourage strategic alliance among the farmers' cooperatives, policy makers, and private sector as well as to promote collective marketing under the ACEDAC coordination. This would definitely be another event where this time coffee lovers might have a chance to learn about the best practices in Jogjakarta, Indonesia.

