

The Coffee Tree of 'Father': From Opium Fields to Arabica Forests

King Bhumibol's Royal Project transformed opium fields into thriving Arabica coffee farms, boosting local economies and restoring the environment.

Royal Project: Born from the initiative of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who aimed to address opium cultivation and poverty among hill tribe communities.

His Majesty promoted the cultivation of Arabica coffee as an economic alternative to opium, personally visiting coffee farms to encourage and uplift farmers.

The Royal Project conducted research and development on coffee varieties, establishing an integrated system for production and marketing, making coffee a major cash crop in the highlands.

Encouraging coffee cultivation under conservation systems beneath large trees helped transform former opium-growing land into profitable forests, restoring the environment sustainably.



His Majesty visited the Hmong ethnic group at 'Baan Doi Pui' in Chiang Mai to observe their lives in 1969.

In 1969, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, along with Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn, and the royal family, visited the Hmong ethnic group in Doi Pui, Chiang Mai, near Phuping Palace, to witness their opium cultivation and poverty firsthand.

The King inquired, "Besides growing opium, do they have income from any other crops?"

This led to the discovery that the Hmong people were also selling peach—a local fruit—which, though small in size, provided them with a comparable income. It was also noted that the Faculty of Agriculture had a cold-weather fruit experiment station in the area, where they successfully grafted larger peach varieties onto native rootstocks.

Thus, His Majesty graciously ordered the study of suitable peach varieties for Thailand's climate, aiming to produce large, sweet peaches that could generate as much income as opium. The King

also donated 200,000 Baht to the Faculty of Agriculture for land acquisition to expand the cold-weather fruit research station in Doi Pui.

The additional land provided by the Faculty of Agriculture became known informally as the “Two-Hundred-Thousand Baht Orchard,” which was the beginning of what would later become the Royal Project in 1969.

The project aimed to eliminate opium cultivation and improve the living standards of hill tribe people, while restoring the environment of Thailand’s highland areas to their natural, fertile state—safe, secure, and sustainable.

Arabica Coffee in the Royal Project



In 1972, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej graciously ordered research into the cultivation of Arabica coffee at Royal Project areas. Research found that coffee trees thrived well in the region, and further studies were conducted to develop disease-resistant coffee varieties, particularly rust-resistant ones, and best practices for cultivating Arabica coffee.



His Majesty ventured into the forest to observe the Arabica coffee trees planted by Karen hill tribe farmers in Nong Lom village, 1974.



In 1974, His Majesty personally visited the Doi Inthanon area, walking over two hours along a steep path to observe just a few coffee trees grown by the Karen hill tribe in Nong Lom village, Chom Thong, Chiang Mai, for the first time. This visit boosted the morale of the coffee growers and significantly impacted coffee research and development in Thailand.

The coffee, granted by His Majesty to replace opium cultivation, became even more significant as the farmers saw firsthand how dedicated the King was to their cause. This dedication helped establish Arabica coffee as a crucial cash crop on Thailand's highlands.

A video from the Royal Project Foundation titled "From 2-3 Coffee Trees to a Coffee Forest: Building an Economy for Conservation" describes His Majesty's statement,

"It's worth the effort because the villagers were overjoyed that I visited. It made them believe that coffee is good and should be planted."

As a result, Arabica coffee spread throughout the highlands, and the Royal Project Foundation developed everything from research and variety development to cultivation technology, processing, and marketing. The project became a full-cycle operation, ensuring the sustainable success of Arabica coffee cultivation.

From 1971, the Royal Project produced over 36 coffee varieties, selecting the best 14. In 2021, 6 of these varieties were registered as Royal Project varieties, alongside 2 others developed by the Highland Research and Development Institute.

Conservation Coffee Cultivation

Today, Arabica coffee has become one of the most popular crops for highland farmers, with over 105,600 rai planted nationwide. The Royal Project emphasizes cultivating coffee under conservation systems beneath large trees, allowing coffee to be a means of forest regeneration while also providing good income for local communities.

By 2021, the Royal Project had 12,000 rai of coffee cultivation and 2,300 farmer members, producing 1,500 tons of Parchment Coffee annually. The project also encourages farmers to form groups to foster self-reliance and strengthens the coffee processing industry in line with Thailand's food safety policies.

Royal Project Coffee Products

The quality coffee produced by the Royal Project is sold nationwide under the "Royal Project" brand. Some of the coffee products include:



Coffee Capsules Single-Origin Mae La Noi (Dark Roast), grown in Mae La Noi, where the cold temperatures and fertile mountain soil create the perfect environment for coffee cultivation. This coffee has a slightly bitter, tangy, and sweet taste with aromas of chocolate, caramel, and vanilla.

Honey Processed Coffee Beans Single-Origin Mae Poon Luang, Chiang Mai, processed through a semi-dry method, yielding a distinct white flower and oolong tea aroma, with a sweet and honey-like flavor.

Additionally, the Royal Project offers products like Drip Coffee, Roasted Coffee Beans (smooth flavor), and Ground Coffee (intense flavor), showcasing the breadth of Arabica coffee cultivated under the Royal Project's initiative.



Ler Tor Royal Project Development Center

The success of the Arabica coffee initiative has led to the expansion of the Royal Project. The most recent addition, the Ler Tor Royal Project Development Center in Tak Province, was established at the request of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, continuing the royal vision of “Sustaining, Preserving, and Advancing” the Royal Project.

This center promotes self-sufficient communities and helps farmers generate income while living sustainably with nature, fostering economic, social, and environmental stability.

National Father’s Day, December 5, 2025, marks the birth anniversary of King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great. We humbly pay tribute to His Majesty’s immeasurable kindness and dedication to the people of Thailand.

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