

Analysis of Opium Cultivation Trends

In recent years, farmers adapted cultivation methodologies to avoid eradication and improve production as follows:

1. Multiple cultivation

1.1 Farmers re-plant in the same area by;

- Harvesting the first crop and later re-planting a second crop in the same field.

- Farmers utilize interval planting by sowing seeds at different periods in the same plot. This method is contingent on the availability of a dependable water supply. However, proximity to a stream or river usually makes the crop easier to detect and eradicate.

- Farmers divide an area into 2 to 3 adjacent parts and utilize interval planting by sowing seeds at different times in different parts of the same area. Fields planted using this method are larger than average. As noted above, fields planted using this method are usually located near a dependable water source.

1.2 Farmers cultivate a number of medium-sized fields that are not adjacent at different periods. If one field is eradicated, plots planted earlier or later can still be harvested.

2. Single cultivation

Owing to the increased effectiveness of the opium eradication campaign, these traditional methodologies are used decreasingly.

2.1 Traditional opium cultivation

The traditional cultivation cycle lasts 5 months, from late October until final harvesting in February. Poppy is cultivated in small plots for personal use by elderly, experienced farmers.

2.2 Opium cultivation in dry areas

Farmers begin field preparation in September and harvest the crop in November. Fields are located in remote, dry areas that are difficult for eradication troops to access. Farmers are

forced to practice shifting cultivation due to the low sustainability and fertility of the fields.

3. Dry season opium cultivation

High-density opium cultivation using this method has been found during the dry season in Mae Chaem and Om Koi districts in Chiang Mai province. This cultivation continues through June of each year.

In addition, a sophisticated network of drug financiers supports opium cultivation by providing farmers with a guaranteed opium price and by supporting inputs for cultivation such as seeds, fertilizers and watering systems. Financiers also advise farmers on how to best avoid eradication.