

[Innovation of the Week: Handling Pests with Care Instead of Chemicals](#)

By Molly Theobald

Suggested Photo:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/41893817@N04/4815109815/>

Between the years of 1975 – 1976, the Cambodian farmer, [Name Name](#), like most farmers in the country during that time, grew vegetables and rice to feed the soldiers of the Lon Nol regime.

IPM combines various strategies and practices to grow healthy crops, reduce damage from pests and minimize the use of artificial inputs. (Photo credit: Bernard Pollack)

Using his bare hands, Name mixed the chemicals DDT, Folidol, Phostrin and Kontrin in order to keep the pests away from his crops. As a result, he suffered from strange and uncomfortable physical symptoms. Sometimes he was unable to move or feel his hands and lower arms, and he experienced pain in his lungs and heart. His short term memory was also affected. All of these symptoms often persisted for up to six months after exposure to the chemicals.

When the regime ended, Name went back to farming for himself and his family, and decided that he would do so without the use of any of the harmful chemical fertilizers that he realized are so dangerous to his health.

With training from organizations supported by the [Food & Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) and its [Regional Vegetable IPM Program in Asia](#)—in addition to some of his own research— Name learned how to prepare botanical insecticides and organic composts from animal wastes and other materials already available on his farm. Now he is now able to avoid expensive and dangerous insecticides almost completely.

This alternative approach is called Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and it combines various strategies and practices to grow healthy crops, reduce damage from pests and minimize the use of artificial inputs. The FAO Regional IPM Program uses informal farmer training schools, facilitated by extension staff or other local farmers, to help train and implement field experiments. Local farmers learn new techniques from each other— as well as develop their own methods through facilitated field experiments—to minimize the use of chemical inputs on their farm.

In addition to raising animals and growing vegetables and rice, Name also produces several varieties of mushrooms organically which he sells at local markets. Though he does not yet receive a higher price for his organic produce, his crops are marketed to an increasingly conscious consumer base as being chemical free. And Name hopes that as awareness about the dangers of many chemical fertilizers increases, so will the value of his crops.

For now, he is happy to be producing enough food to feed his family and earn a significant portion of their income, without endangering his own health, or the health of those that enjoy his crops.

To read more about how farmers can reduce the financial –as well as environmental and health—costs of chemical inputs, see: and [For Pest Control, Following Nature's Lead, Tiny Bugs to Solve Big Pest Problem, In Botswana, Cultivating an Interest in Agriculture and Wildlife Conservation, Malawi's Real Miracle, Emphasizing Malawi's Indigenous Vegetables as Crops, and Finding 'Abundance' in What is Local.](#)