

## The Power of Compassion

By Neil K. Newell and Lloyd D. Newell

[A portion of the complete article]

### Thailand

Joel and Kathryn Sperry of Heber City, Utah, always wanted to go on a mission. After Joel retired from a career in education, they received a call to Surin, Thailand. They felt stunned. They didn't have much idea of what they'd find there. They knew they would be in a rural area and their primary assignment would be training local elementary and middle-school English teachers. For several months, the Sperrys worked to introduce new teaching techniques and to help Thai teachers and school administrators refine their English pronunciation.

But as they taught, the Sperrys noticed many of the children arriving at school without shoes. Some had little to eat. The more the Sperrys investigated, the more they realized the children's diet consisted mostly of rice, very few vegetables, and almost no protein.

Joel had always loved gardening and Kathryn's father had worked as a county agricultural agent, so the thought occurred to them that it might be possible to create a few self-sustaining projects that could not only provide additional nutrition for the children's school lunch but also help the children learn to grow their own food.

School administrators were excited about the idea, and the Sperrys proposed it to the Church Welfare Services. With funding from the Church, projects began to spring up in schools all over the province of Surin. In one school, the students created an agricultural plot where they weeded, watered, and grew fresh vegetables. In another, they created an artificial pond and stocked it with fresh fish. Chickens laid eggs and provided protein in another school project. In yet another, they built a specially designed shed for growing mushrooms.

In each case, the schools purchased the products from the projects, providing funds to ensure the projects would continue. Lunch at the schools became more nutritious, providing students with needed vitamins and protein. Students learned valuable skills as they grew food and cared for animals. By the time the Sperrys had fulfilled their mission and were ready to return home, they had created projects in 36 schools.

“When we first announced we were going to serve a mission,” Sister Sperry says, “people would say, ‘But we need you in the ward.’ After serving in Thailand, I know that we were needed more in the world.”