

# The Nation



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## FROM THE PROVINCES

### *Developing a high antioxidant cuppa*

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THE NATION

AS PART OF its efforts to win international recognition as a source of fine tea, Chiang Rai is attempting to develop a strain of tea with a high concentration of antioxidants that can be marketed on the strength of its health benefits.

Dr Sailom Samphanvech-sopha, who heads the Tea Institute of Mae Fah Luang University, told *The Nation* that institute had been specifically established to develop local varieties of the tea plant, known to science as *Camellia sinensis*.

The institute has won support from various government agencies and educational institutes.

"The [central] government and Chiang Rai Governor Narin Panichakij have made it a policy that the province should win international recognition for its fine tea," Sailom said yesterday.

She said that Mae Fah Luang University had been assigned to head the tea-development project, and her institute was tasked with improving the standard of tea seeds. The Tea Institute was founded to research and distribute knowledge to farmers on how to properly grow tea.

According to Sailom, Chiang



A TEA plantation in Chiang Rai.



Rai has geographical advantages when it comes to growing fine teas: a perfect temperature, between 21 and 32 degrees Celsius; and a highland location, at least 500 metres above sea level.

Officials from local government agencies, six northern universities and as many as 40 researchers have joined the institute in conducting research on

tea-growing methods on local hill sides.

Sailom said the research's main purpose was to produce tea seeds with higher antioxidant content than other varieties.

"Antioxidants are a chemical substance in tea that is good for the health," she said.

About 80 per cent of Chiang Rai's many tea farmers grow plants on Doi Mae Salong and in

Mae Lao sub-district.

Two famous varieties of tea grown in Chiang Rai are Oolong [a Chinese tea known to be good for the health] and Mae Chan Luang. The former was originally imported from Taiwan, while the latter was developed by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Sailom expressed hope that her institute's work would boost tea consumption in Thailand.