

# A LONG ROAD DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

Bringing *"One Health"*  
to a Remote Hmong Village



ONE HEALTH  
FESTIVAL





# Welcome to ... Hmong village

Up in the mist-shrouded hills of Nan province, life moves to the rhythm of nature and tradition. For the local communities and hill tribes nestled in these remote areas, food is far more than mere sustenance; it is a communion. Gathering around sharing food during a village festival are deeply ingrained cultural rituals.

During these celebrations, dishes are often prepared from pigs slaughtered and cooked right in the villagers' own backyards. Some of these traditional plates, such as the local delicacy 'Larb Lued' (raw blood salad), are served raw or undercooked. Yet, within these cherished traditions lies a hidden vulnerability: the risk of zoonotic diseases, such as *Streptococcus suis*, which can spread from animals to humans through raw or undercooked pork, sometimes leaving devastating consequences like permanent hearing loss in its wake.

Recognizing that the health of people cannot be separated from the health of animals and the environment, a unique initiative journeyed into these highlands. The mission was clear, not to erase centuries-old culture, but to protect it through emotional engagement and behavioral transformation.

# The Day the Mountain Smelled of BBQ

High up where the clouds brush against the peaks of Nan, the morning air is usually filled with the scent of pine and woodsmoke. But recently, a new aroma has been drifting up the winding trails: the savory, irresistible scent of Moo Krata (Thai BBQ).

As social media reaches even the most remote Hmong villages, the city's favorite pastime has become a mountain trend. However, in a place like Ban Nam Tuang, hours away from the nearest hospital, a "trendy" meal can quickly turn dangerous if the pork isn't cooked right. This is why we found ourselves at the local school, hosting a gathering that was part cooking class, part life-saving mission, and 100% heartwarming

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# A Silent Walk and a Loud Realization

The day began early. Before the sun had fully cleared the ridges, villagers started appearing. Some wore their beautifully intricate, traditional Hmong outfits; others arrived with toddlers balanced on hips or grandbabies wrapped in colorful cloths.

The first stop was a "Silent Tunnel." We lined the walkway with photos telling the story of *Streptococcus suis* (Hearing Loss Fever). There was no sound—a deliberate choice to mimic the permanent silence many face after contracting the disease from raw pork. A man stood within the shaded corridor, his gaze searching the photos with a hint of confusion, as if the stories on the wall were a language he couldn't quite translate.

# Echoes of Silence: Lessons from a Survivor:

Inside the school hall, the atmosphere shifted from somber to cozy as we watched real-life testimonials from survivors of *Streptococcus suis*. She was a girl who had fallen ill simply from eating undercooked pork during a Moo Krata meal—a mistake that changed their lives forever. Seeing their struggles sparked a powerful wave of awareness in the room; it wasn't just about sharing knowledge, but about creating a healthy fear that made everyone realize the hidden danger in a pink, raw slice of meat."



# Beyond the Lecture: Conversations as Family:



Following the film, the formal atmosphere melted into an open community dialogue. Instead of a standard lecture, public health doctors and veterinarians sat among the villagers, bridging the gap between expert knowledge and local wisdom. They spoke not as officials, but as family members, chatting with the villagers about the dangers of the traditional raw Larb and backyard slaughtering, and answering every question with care and fostering a deep sense of mutual understanding across the mountain.



# A Masterclass in Sizzling Safety:

Then came the fun part: The Demo. We didn't use fancy electric grills. We used what they use—firewood stoves and Domed Grill Pans. The "Correct Way to Moo Krata" became a live performance. We showed them the "Two-Chopstick Dance": one pair for navigating the raw, pink meat onto the grill, and a clean pair to harvest the golden-brown, sizzling victory.

But the lesson didn't stop at the grill. We also tackled a beloved, yet risky, local staple: Larb (minced meat salad). The team demonstrated how to transform traditional raw Larb into a safe, delicious feast. The villagers watched intently as the chef stirred the mixture, ensuring every drop of deep red blood cooked down completely, turning from a dangerous crimson to a perfectly safe, rich brown. It was a visual lesson in health, proving that safety doesn't mean sacrificing flavor.

# TikTok Wisdom from the Next Generation:

To make sure this knowledge stays in the village for a long time, we turned to the youth for the “One Health Young Content Creators” activity. Among teenagers had spent days researching the disease to create short, funny videos. They used their smartphones to produce TikTok clips on safe food practices. They laughed, learned, and joined a community competition for awards. One student told me, "I had to learn the facts to make the content, and now I've already told my mom she has to boil the Larb until the blood disappears!" These teenagers became the new health guards for their families.





# The Great Feast:

Before the final reward, we played a quick "Knowledge Gate" game. To get their "BBQ Pass," villagers had to answer questions about safe cooking. The competitive spirit was high—there's nothing like the promise of grilled pork to sharpen the memory!

As the grills fired up, the sight was breathtaking. Nearly 100 villagers sat in circles of four or five on the floor, huddled around the glowing embers. For many, this was their **"first time"** ever eating Moo Kratha.

I watched an old woman carefully used her "raw" chopsticks to flip a slice of pork, waiting patiently—unlike the usual rush of a hungry diner—until every bit of pink was gone. She dipped it in the spicy sauce, took a bite, and closed her eyes with a massive grin.

"It's better when you know it won't make you sick," she laughed, gesturing to her two pairs of chopsticks.



As the sun began to dip, the event didn't end with a "thank you and goodbye." Without being asked, the villagers rose as one. They sorted the trash and swept the school grounds until they sparkled.

The mountain air returned to its crisp, pine-scented self, but the people of Ban Nam Tuang walked home with more than just full stomachs. They carried a new tradition: one where the joy of a communal meal is never traded for the safety of the community. In this remote corner of the world, we learned that the best way to protect a culture is to sit down, light a fire, and cook together properly.

Protecting health is not just about building hospitals or giving out medicine. It is about reaching people where they live, understanding their daily lives, and giving them the knowledge to protect themselves. By teaching this remote village how to eat safely today, we are saving them from a long, painful trip down the mountain tomorrow.

# Thank You



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