

# Thai sugarcane reaper trumps all rivals, says maker

**Following** his success in developing a prototype sugarcane harvester for less than half the price of an imported model, retired engineer Boonyarit Suwannasarn is now working on an unmanned version.

The prototype of the second model of his harvester is about 90% complete and a team of 10 local mechanics are now putting the finishing touches to it.

Mr Boonyarit, 59, previously worked on an off-shore oil platform. He now lives in Sawankhalok district of Sukhothai and has turned his home into a workshop for designing and developing cane harvesters. His team spent about six months building the prototype by hand.

When finished, the new model will not need

a driver as the engine control unit (ECU) comes from a drone and is equipped with a global positioning system, Mr Boonyarit said.

The harvester will work independently, with only a single worker needed to monitor it from afar to ensure it does not tumble over if it hits a large hole, or that the harvested cane does not fall off as it is loaded onto a truck by the conveyor belt, he said.

The ECU used in the second-generation harvester cost just 5,000 baht, compared to 200,000 baht to 300,000 baht for the one used in an



imported harvester, he said.

"An imported cane harvester usually costs 13 million baht while this Thai-made one will cost about 6 million baht," he said. "Those imported harvesters are also full of sets of wires that cost

30,000 baht to 40,000 baht each. Ours is more or less wireless."

Mr Boonyarit said being locally made means it is more convenient and economical for the owner to maintain and repair because the parts can be purchased in Thailand. The mechanical and electrical systems are also far simpler than foreign models, he said.

It is a combination of outstanding features adopted from both American- and Australian-made cane harvester technology, he said.

The prototype has been used to cut more than 11,000 tonnes of cane already. Mr Boonyarit said his harvester consumes 200 fewer litres of fuel per day than an imported model of a similar class. It also more efficiently captures the juice from the cane during harvesting, he added.