



The Malaysian Society of Soil Science Newsletter

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Bumper Issue

Apologies for the late newsletter. I had been busy with the PTK (Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan) training and other activities earlier this year. Consequently, I had missed several of MSSS activities, in particular the SOILS 2004 conference. It is quite difficult to write an article about an activity without first hand experience. It is even more difficult to ask people to write for the newsletter!

But there is some good news. The absence of the newsletter was noticed. I did receive some queries about the delay or "the missing issue". It seems I might just been right to comment in one of the earlier newsletters that MSSS newsletters are such that they would not be missed until they are actually gone. To make up for that one missing newsletter, I decided to combine both issues into one. So, folks, here you go.

Best wishes. Dr. C.B.S. Teh, **Editor**

Smile, we are on TV!

In April this year, a feature story on our society appeared on the terrestrial TV channel RTM1 in the programme Malaysia 2020. The crux of the programme was the interview with Prof. Dr. Mohd. Khanif Yusop, the MSSS president, in which he was asked general questions about the history, goals and vision of the society, in particular how our society would contribute to the growth of the agriculture sector in this country. There were short interviews on a few (but shy) society members as well as some short clips on some MSSS activities.

As mentioned by our President, these are exciting times to be in agriculture. With the government re-emphasising agriculture as a major contributor to this country's growth, it is no wonder that several agricultural players, including MSSS, and their activities are being accentuated.

In short, this has been a good exposure to the society.

Management Committee 2004/05

As elected during the last AGM, here are the management committee members for the session 2004/05:

President

Prof. Dr. Khanif Yusof

Immediate Past President

Prof. Dr. Zulkifli Hj. Shamsuddin

Vice President (Peninsular Malaysia)

Dr. Zin Zawawi Hj. Zakaria

Vice President (Sarawak)

Mrs. Susilawati Kassim

Vice President (Sabah)

Mr. Shahrudin Bakar

Hon. Secretary

Dr. C.B.S. Teh

Hon. Asst. Secretary

Mr. Ismail Abu Bakar

Hon. Treasurer

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anuar Abdul Rahim

Hon. Asst. Treasurer

Mr. Mohd. Said

Co-opted Committee Members

Prof. Wan Mohamad Wan Abd. Kadir

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Che Fauziah

Dr. Amir Hamzah Ahmad Ghazali

Dr. Izham Ahmad

Dr. Siva K. Balasundram

Mr. Abdul Rahim Othman

Auditors

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosenani Abu Bakar

Mr. Amir Hamzah Yasak

Forum on Open-Field Burning in Malaysian Rice Paddies

The above forum, co-organised by the MSSS and the Faculty of Agriculture, UPM, was held on June 11, 2004 at the Dewan Fakulti Pertanian, UPM.

The primary aim of the forum was to create public awareness on the problem of open-field burning, and to assess the problem and to propose a suitable mitigation plan. Sixty participants from various government and private agencies and non-government organizations had attended the forum. The panelists comprised of Dato' Hj. Abdul Rahim Saleh (General Manager, MADA), Dato' Embi Yusoff (Deputy Director General, MARDI), En. Abdul Halim Hamid (Senior Manager - Quality Assurance, PLUS), Dr. Hasnah Md. Jais (Lecturer, School of Biological Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia) and Dr. Syed Omar Syed Rastan (Associate Professor, Department of Land Management, UPM). Prof. Dr. Zulkifli Hj. Shamsuddin was the forum moderator.

The first speaker (Dato' Embi Yusoff, MARDI) gave a general appraisal of the problem and highlighted reasons why open-

field burning (OFB) still remains a preferred method of waste disposal. He concluded that OFB will continue at least until a more 'cost-effective' alternative is developed.

The second speaker (En. Abdul Halim Hamid, PLUS) stressed that OFB should be stopped by all means in view of its economic and social hazards. He called for an increase in rice prices so as to increase the disposable income of farmers that is taxable. The tax collected can then be channelled into research and development programs geared towards formulating a suitable waste disposal strategy.

The third speaker (Dato' Hj. Abdul Rahim Saleh, MADA) defended the practice of OFB stating that it is an old and efficient practice with proven benefits. He concurred with the first speaker that so long as farmers are not provided with attractive incentives, OFB will continue to be the primary method of waste disposal.

The fourth speaker (Dr. Hasnah Md. Jais, USM) suggested the use of worms to decompose rice straw. She added that typically 1 kg of worms would consume 1 kg of straw and decomposition

could be achieved within several days. Such a method of managing the wastes is comparatively cheap and reasonably rapid.

The fifth speaker (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Syed Omar Syed Rastan) enumerated on the nutrient losses that result from OFB. He stressed that in situ conservation (i.e., slash and incorporate) of rice straw can produce an equivalent fertilizer (NPK) value of RM 440 per ton. He added that with rising fertilizer prices, in situ conservation can potentially outweigh the benefits of OFB (i.e., control of pest/disease).

The Q & A session was active and stretched for almost 40 minutes. In conclusion, a general consensus towards controlled burning was reached. It was agreed that an active cooperation between the government and private, as well as non-government agencies, be fostered at a national level. A plausible step forward would be to form a National Task Force dealing with OFB. To this end, the MSSS is currently in the process of forming the necessary framework that will hopefully lead to formation of a NTF on OFB.

- Dr. Siva Balasundram (UPM)

The Star snubs MSSS

Accepting our invitation, The Star newspaper reporter, Tan Cheng Li, attended our recent Forum on Open Burning in Rice Paddies (see article above). Some four weeks later, this issue of open burning appeared in The Star newspaper under Section Two on Tuesday July 6, 2004.

Though this was excellent exposure on a very important issue, we were very surprised that there was no mention at all on the forum or its organisers (MSSS and Faculty of Agriculture, UPM) any

where in their two-page article! For some baffling reason, The Star newspaper has snubbed us although the reporter was treated almost like a VIP during and after the forum.

In response to this snub, the Management Committee has asked the organising committee to write a letter to the editor of Section Two to formally state our objections. Though we do not expect an apology, we felt it necessary to highlight their serious omission (read, snub) on, firstly, the forum organisers, and secondly, on crediting their source of information for their article.

Invitational seminar by Prof. Kiwamu Minamisawa

A seminar on "Diazotrophic endophytes in gramineous plants" by Prof. Kiwamu Minamisawa was held successfully on 25 March 2004. This seminar was co-organised by MSSS and the Faculty of Agriculture, UPM.

In this seminar, Prof. Minamisawa reported the existence of anaerobic nitrogen-fixing consortia (ANFICOs) consisting of N₂-fixing clostridia and diverse nondiazotrophic bacteria in nonleguminous plants.

He and his co-workers found these ANFICOs while attempting to overcome a problem with culturing nitrogen-fixing microbes from various gramineous plants. A major feature of ANFICOs is that N₂ fixation by the anaerobic clostridia is

supported by the elimination of oxygen by the accompanying bacteria in the culture. In a few ANFICOs, nondiazotrophic bacteria specifically induced nitrogen fixation of the clostridia in culture.

ANFICOs are widespread in wild rice species and pioneer plants, which are able to grow in unfavourable locations. These results indicated that clostridia are naturally occurring endophytes in gramineous plants and that clostridial N₂ fixation arises in association with nondiazotrophic endophytes.

Prof. Kiwamu Minamisawa is a professor at the Laboratory for Environmental Microbiology, Graduate School of Life Sciences, Tohoku University.

MSSS Fellows: A modest lot?

So far there has been no nominations for the MSSS Fellows. Recall that MSSS Fellow is an award given to distinguished society members who have contributed significantly to the field of soil science.

Since there has been no nominations, the Management Committee has recently decided to nominate a few names, just to "get the ball rolling". The CVs for these candidates are now being obtained and will be evaluated. The MSSS Fellows will be awarded during the coming annual soil science conference.

SOILS 2005

With the successful SOILS 2004 at Penang just ended, plans are underway to organise next year's annual soil science conference, SOILS 2005. This time it is agreed to hold SOILS 2005 at Kedah with the post-conference tour at Chengmai, Thailand. The competent Prof. Dr Wan Mohamad Wan Abd. Kadir was selected as the organising chairman.

International Union of Soil Sciences...zzz

The IUSS has recently confirmed our membership into IUSS this year. This means that members of MSSS are also members of the IUSS.

Frankly, though, membership into IUSS is a little anti-climatic. Membership into IUSS was only confirmed after repeated pleas from the MSSS Hon. Secretary. Even after confirmation, there were no handouts or information sheets given to us, welcoming our membership. It was only after more repeated pleas did IUSS finally emailed to us some information sheets, and yes, gave us one single IUSS bulletin book.

PETRONAS-MSSS International Urea Conference

This on-off-on-off conference seems to be on again. Exasperating, yes, but Petronas has decided that we should organise this conference. The chairman for this conference is Prof. Madya Dr. Ahmad Husni Mohd. Haniff (UPM). The proposal and budget for this conference has been written and is now under Petronas' consideration. Nonetheless, due to some disagreement on the conference date and theme, this conference might just be off yet again. I give up.

Letter of support to the Prime Minister

The Management Committee has agreed to write a letter to our country's Prime Minister in support of the government's policy and re-emphasis on agriculture as an important contributor to the country's growth. This letter is being drafted and there is no rush to mail it yet.

Professional body coordinators

The MSSS representatives to BIM are the President and the Vice President (Peninsular Malaysia), and the representatives to COSTAM are the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Asst. Secretary.

Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)

RSPO has recently asked several organisations including MSSS for some ideas and feedback to develop a "standard" guideline for palm oil production, not only to be practised in Malaysia but in all palm oil producing countries.

This is in view that in recent years the palm oil sector has been increasingly linked to global concerns about deforestation and loss of biodiversity. Consequently, several palm oil industry players and conservation groups have joined hands to set standards that will dictate future production and usage of the commodity.

RSPO is new; it is a loose consortium of international and local parties dedicated to contribute to the expansion of sustainable produced palm oil and its uses based on economic, social and environmental viability. RSPO includes various producers, processors, traders, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers, banks and investors, non-governmental organisations and scientists.

The 2nd Roundtable Meeting on Sustainable Palm Oil is scheduled to be held at the Grand Hyatt Jakarta on 5th (Tuesday) and 6th (Wednesday) October, 2004 that will continue to set and endorse the guideline for palm oil production.

Calendar

Eurosoil 2004, September 4-12, 2004. Freiburg, Germany. <http://www.forst.uni-freiburg.de/eurosoil/>

International Conference on Finite-Element Models, MODFLOW, and More 2004: Solving Groundwater Problems (FEM_MODFLOW), September 13-16, 2004. Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. http://www.natur.cuni.cz/utf8/fem_modflow/

Eco Engineering - The Use of Vegetation to Improve Slope Stability, September 13-17, 2004. Thessaloniki, Greece. <http://www.ecoslopes.com/>

Agriculture Congress. "Innovations Towards Modernized Agriculture". Oct. 4-7, 2004. Kuala Lumpur. <http://www.agri.upm.edu.my/congress>

4th International Agroenviron 2004 Symposium: Role of Multi-purpose Agriculture in Sustaining Global Environment, October 20-24, 2004. Udine, Italy. <http://www.dpvta.uniud.it/~agroenv/>

IUPAC 40th Congress: Innovation in Chemistry, August 14-19, 2005. Beijing, China. <http://www.iupac-congress05.org.cn/>

19th International Congress on Irrigation and Drainage, September 10-18, 2005. Beijing, China. <http://www.icid.org/>

International Conference on Human Impacts on Soil Quality Attributes, Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran, Sep. 12-16, 2005. <http://www.iut.ac.ir/cesoil>

8th International Conference on Solar Energy and Applied Photochemistry (Solar'05), February 20-26, Luxor, Aswan, Egypt. <http://www.photoenergy.org/>

International Forest Vegetation Conference, June 20-24, Corvallis, Oregon, USA. <http://outreach.cof.orst.edu/schdevt.html>

15th International Plant Nutrition Colloquium, September 14-23, Beijing, China. <http://www.cau.edu.cn/ipnc/>