



The Malaysian Society of Soil Science Newsletter

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Busy busy busy

Dear colleagues,

The last three months was a busy time for some of us in the MSSS Management Committee. No, not busy with MSSS activities, unfortunately, but busy with the activities related to the ISO certificate compliance by the Faculty of Agriculture, UPM. As there were no MSSS meetings during that time, there were no updates to report until the ISO audit was completed. I am glad to say that the Faculty did pass the ISO audit, and I am also glad to report that there had been a few meetings after that. That means I finally have something to report!

As time approaches for the AGM in April, the Management Committee and other various sub-committees are busy with various activities. The three biggest activities coming your way are the Soil Science Conference of Malaysia 2004 to be held at Penang, the Forum on "Open Burning of Rice Straw", and the nominations for MSSS Fellows.

So there you go.

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

Malaysian Journal of Soil Science (MJSS)

Expect two issues of our society's annual journal to be published this year. There are good signs that vol. 6 (Special Issue), 2002 and vol. 7, 2003 will be published some time this year. This is because enough good papers have been received, reviewed and corrected in time.

Currently, the publication is two years behind schedule but this backlog should clear with the publication of these two issues soon. One of the problems often faced by the MJSS editorial board is the lack of papers. Nonetheless, this situation has gradually improved. Increasingly more authors are contributing their papers to MJSS—papers that they had presented in the yearly Soil Science

Conference of Malaysia. The society's website (e-msss.com/mjss) has also greatly encouraged the contribution of papers from overseas, mainly from India, Pakistan and the Middle East.

Amendments to the Constitution

The Registrar of Societies has recently approved the amendments to the MSSS' constitution as discussed in the last AGM. These amendments are related to the:

Increased annual fee: The RM10 increase in annual membership is so that society members will automatically be members of the IUSS (International Union of Soil Science), regarded as the "United Nations" of all soil science societies. This increase in membership fee will be effective after the AGM this year.

Student membership: Membership applications by local university students will have to be treated differently because their membership, according to the rules and regulations in all local universities, requires the approval by the respective university's Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

MSSS Fellow: This membership is an award in recognition of distinguished members of MSSS who have contributed significantly to the progress of soil science and agriculture. Fellows are a life-time appointment and of lower status only to the society's Honorary members. In addition, MSSS Fellows will have the acronym of "FMSoil" as a name title.

Nominations for MSSS Fellows

All society members can nominate candidates for the MSSS Fellow. The terms and conditions of a Fellow nominee are straightforward: 1) must be an ordinary member of MSSS for not less than 5 years; 2) has contributed extensively to the activities and progress of the society; and 3) on being elected/appointed, a Fellow would continue getting the same right and privileges enjoyed by ordinary members. Nomination forms can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary or from the website: e msss.com/fellow.htm.

Forum: Open Burning of Rice Straw

“Do not wait for disasters before acting”, writes Alex Kee in a letter that was published in The Star newspaper on Feb. 7, 2004. This was in response to several fatal car accidents recently, where thick smog from the open burning of rice straw had severely obscured the visibility at nearby roads. In rice cultivation, farmers usually do not incorporate the rice straw into the soil, preferring instead to burn all stubble and straw. This of course contributes to air pollution and, recently, to fatal accidents. Solutions to these problems appear bountiful: composting the rice straws, burning the rice straws but in a controlled manner using on-site incinerators, or using modified straw balers to remove all rice straws from the fields. So what is the problem?

With these concerns in mind, our society is organising a half-day forum to highlight and discuss these problems and solutions. This will hopefully lead to greater and renewed interests as well as more focused research to engage the issues. It was suggested in one of the Management Committee meeting that UPM should host the forum, with invited speakers from MADA, FELCRA, MARDI, UPM, MOSTE (Environment) and MPOB. This is still work in progress and details will be announced shortly.

The task of organising this forum has been given to Dr. Siva Balasundram (UPM) who has recently been co-opted into the MSSS Management Committee to head the Professional Enhancement section.

Managing Soils of the Miri-Bintulu Area

MSSS and Param Agricultural Soil Survey Sdn. Bhd. had jointly organised a workshop and soil correlation tour entitled ‘Managing Soil of the Miri-Bintulu Area’ at Bintulu on 9-11 Dec. 2003. There were about 60 participants, mainly oil palm planters, planners and agronomists.

Eleven papers were presented from organisations such as Golden Hope, UNIMAS, Woodman Sdn. Bhd., and Applied Agricultural Research Sdn. Bhd. The purpose of this function was to address the issues of stagnating oil palm yields and increasing cost of production.

The workshop was followed by visits to several soil profile pits at Miri and Bintulu estates. These activities were reported in the Sarawak Tribune newspaper on 13 Dec. 2003, in which it carried a photo of our distinguished

Vice President (Sarawak), Mr. U.T. Pupathy, presenting his paper “Oil palm cultivation on hilly and steep terrain in Sarawak”.

SOILS2004: Final Call for Papers

The final announcement brochures for the Soil Science Conference of Malaysia 2004 (SOILS2004) will be distributed soon to all members and interested parties. The conference will be held at Penang Island from 13-14 April 2004, and the post-conference tour will be at Medan, Indonesia from 15-18 April 2004. The conference fee is RM450, 500 and 150 for members, non-members and students, respectively. And the post-conference tour fee, inclusive of travel, meals and accommodation, is RM900. The tour includes visits to Benlias oil palm research station, volcanic soils in Brastagi, and Lake Toba.

The theme of the conference is “Innovation in soil science to support sustainable agriculture”. So far, over 20 papers have been received, with more expected as the conference date approaches. The final date of submission of papers is March 15, 2004. For further details and online registration, please go to: e-msss.com/soils2004.

Southeast Asia Soil Congress?

Following the indeterminate state of the PETRONAS-MSSS International Urea Conference, MSSS has decided to go it alone by organising our very own international conference. The target date is in a year or two from now. Our society is immensely proud of its consistent decade-long record of holding successful annual Malaysian soil science conferences.

Perhaps it is now the time to achieve new levels by organising international conferences regularly. One strong possibility is for MSSS to take the lead by reviving the “Southeast Asia Soil Congress” which was held several years ago with the participation of countries in the Southeast Asia region. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Husni Mohd. Haniff (UPM) has been given this appraisal task.

Calendar

Brownfield Asia 2004. International Conf. on Remediation and Management of Contaminated Land: Focus on Asia. 8-10 Jun. 2004. Kuala Lumpur (Email: sec@iem.po.my)

Agriculture Congress. “Innovations Towards Modernized Agriculture”. 4-7 Oct. 2004. Melaka (www.agri.upm.edu.my/congress) ⊗