

SEARCA opens its 55th anniversary festivities with a celebration of sustainable and healthy cuisine



SEARCA kicked off its 55th-anniversary celebration on 22 October 2021 through Dish Dialogues: Creating a Sustainable and Healthy Plate via its SOLVE platform. The event also celebrated World Food Day with the theme "Our actions are our future - Better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life." Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, Program Head of the Education and Collective Learning Department (ECLD), opened the discussion on food and making sustainable choices for good health and protecting the environment. She also invited everyone for the next-day event "Pistang Pagkain at Kabataang Pinoy" or "Pistang PagKaPinoy" which discussed food and its intersections with business, nutrition, arts, culture, gender, and tourism. Dr. Cuaresma thanked SEARCA's partners and stakeholders throughout the 55 years as it celebrates its accomplishments in promoting agricultural and rural development in the region.

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The UC, SEARCA, and SUC-ACAP plan for the capacity building of Philippine HEIs in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Natural Resources



The Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC) and the State Universities and Colleges - Association of Colleges of Agriculture in the Philippines (SUC-ACAP) entered into an agreement for the project "Leveling Up Philippine Higher Education Institutions in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Natural Resources (LevelUPHEI AFaR)" implemented by SEARCA with funding from the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will enable SUC-ACAP members to participate in UC activities, and send faculty/staff to the UC members on mobility.

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Maejo University President receives highest award during the 103rd Loyalty Day of UP Los Baños



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Photo courtesy of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (14 October 2021)
<https://uplb.edu.ph/all-news/thai-uni-president-is-outstanding-uplb-alumnus/>



The UC and the State Universities and Colleges - Association of Colleges of Agriculture in the Philippines (SUC-ACAP) entered into an agreement for the project "Leveling Up Philippine Higher Education Institutions in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Natural Resources (LevelUPHEI AFAr)"

The UC, SEARCA, and SUC-ACAP plan for the capacity building of Philippine HEIs in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Natural Resources

The ceremonial signing of MOU on August 10, 2021, was attended by principal signatories and witnesses from IPB University, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Kasetsart University, Universiti Putra Malaysia, University of the Philippines Los Baños, Universitas Brawijaya, National Taiwan University, SEARCA, and SUC-ACAP. Newly appointed UC members, Maejo University, Central Luzon State University, and Visayas State University were also present during the signing. Among the members of SUC-ACAP, 32 Philippine SUCs attended the virtual event to formalize the partnership as part of CHED's 2021 ASEAN Celebration.

Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, Program Head of the Education and Collective Learning Department (ECLD), SEARCA, provided an overview of the project and the collaboration, the institutions involved, and the activities offered by the UC in line with the project.

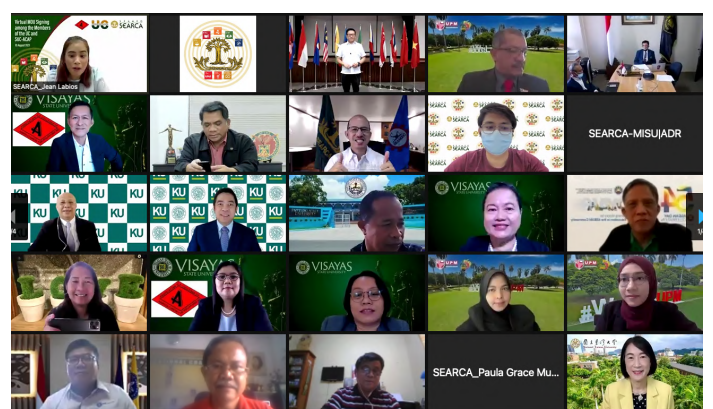
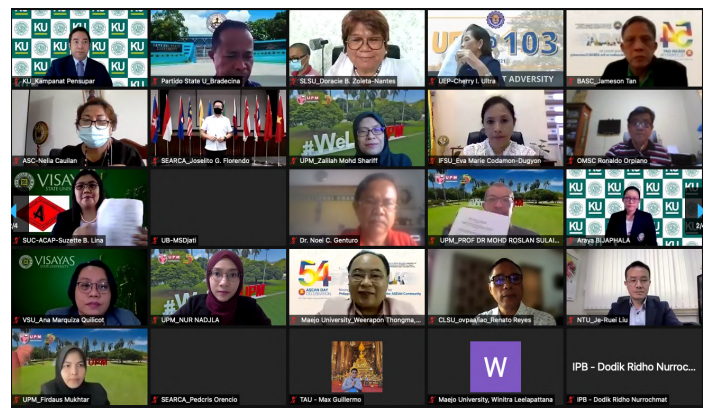
Speaking on behalf of Dr. J. Prospero De Vera III, CHED Chairperson, Atty. Lily Freida M. Milla, Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Deputy Executive Director; and Director III, International Affairs Staff, highlighted that the partnership "is a way forward and a victory for Philippine Higher Education as we strengthen ASEAN relations by establishing academic exchanges and collaborations."

According to Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, the occasion showed the culmination of the vision of working together across disciplines for the region's development.

Dr. Edgardo E. Tulin, SUC-ACAP and Visayas State University President, spoke on behalf of the association members and expressed his gratitude to the UC for partnering with SUC-ACAP. The partnership with the UC is in line with its goal to provide capacity building for Philippine HEIs to ensure the quality of agriculture professionals in the future. Dr. Tulin highlighted that addressing the concerns and challenges in the agriculture sector requires partnerships to deliver impactful results, and they are looking forward to working with the UC.

Professor Dr. Mohd Roslan Sulaiman, Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Putra Malaysia and the Chair of the 2021 UC Executive Board Meeting, delivered a message on behalf of the UC. He encouraged the SUC-ACAP attendees to participate in the UC activities and expressed hope that the partnership will pave for resilient instruction, research, extension, and administration in higher education amidst globalization and in a time of disruptions and uncertainties.

Mr. Joselito G. Florendo, Deputy Director for Administration of SEARCA, expressed his gratitude to all the institutions who have contributed to the capacity-building activities addressing agricultural development in Southeast Asia. SEARCA hopes that this partnership will strengthen the institutional ties between and among leading agricultural universities in the region and allow the participating institutions to further their mandate. Institutional linkages and knowledge-sharing activities have helped elevate the internationalization of higher education not only for Philippine SUCs but in many other universities in Southeast Asia. The UC will be opening its Summer School, Graduate Forum, Faculty Forum, and Faculty Mobilities to all 75 members of SUC-ACAP. SEARCA will also provide short-term training programs relevant to research and development, and leadership and management of HEIs, and cross visits to higher educational institutions in SEAMEO member countries.



32 Philippine SUCs attended the virtual event together with members of the UC and CHED officials.

Maejo University President receives highest award during the 103rd Loyalty Day of UP Los Baños



The University Consortium congratulates Dr. Weerapon Thongma, President of Maejo University, as he received the UPLBAA Presidential Award during the 103rd Loyalty Day and Alumni Awarding Ceremony organized by the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and the UPLB Alumni Association (UPLBAA) on 10 October 2021. Dr. Weerapon was honored for his important contribution to promoting inter-country linkages among Southeast Asian higher education institutions.

Dr. Weerapon pursued his PhD in Extension Education with a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) - SEARCA scholarship. Previously, he received the Outstanding Alumni Award at the College of Public Affairs and Development in 2019. Maejo University also became an affiliate member of the UC under his leadership in 2021. Currently, he is the president of the Asian Association of Agricultural Colleges and Universities.

Dr. Weerapon was joined by one former UC grantee and two other SEARCA alumni who likewise received recognition from UPLB. Dr. Jose O. Sargento was honored with the 2021 Outstanding Golden Jubilarian Award. Dr. Sargento received a UC Thesis Grant for his PhD in Forest Resources Management and dissertation on "Participation of major stakeholders in the conservation of the Makiling Forest Reserve."

From the College of Economics and Management (CEM), Dr. Catherine Roween C. Almaden, President of Northern Bukidnon Community College, was awarded Outstanding Alumna in Higher Education Management. Dr. Almaden took her PhD in Development Studies and was a recipient of the SEARCA PhD Research Scholarship for her study on "Multidimensional Indicators of Adaptive Capacity of Rice-farming Households to Address Varying Conditions of Salt-Water intrusion in Northern Mindanao, Philippines."

From the School of Environmental Science and Management (SESAM), Dr. Sonnie A. Vedra, Professor VI of Mindanao State University, was awarded as Outstanding Alumnus for Research. Dr. Vedra finished his PhD in Environmental Science with a SEARCA PhD Research Scholarship for his study on "Analysis of the anthropogenic-based disturbances among the indigenous goby population in Mandulog river system, Northern Mindanao."

SEARCA opens its 55th anniversary festivities with a celebration of sustainable and healthy cuisine



The guest chef for the event was Prof. Dr. Shahrim Karim, Professor of Malaysia Heritage Food and Culture from the Department of Food Service Management, Faculty of Food Science and Technology in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). He discussed sustainable and healthy consumption while featuring *Asam Rebus Keladi* with Fish (Sour and Spicy Yam Stew with Fish) accompanied by *Sambal Belacan* (shrimp paste sambal). Prof. Dr. Shahrim shared his passion for food and culture, which started at a young age while helping his mother. After finishing high school, he went to a cooking school, and then worked in Singapore as a Chef for a renowned hotel and then to New York City for further studies. Food has been a big part of his life, and he has made it his mission to promote Malaysian cuisine to the world. He describes Southeast Asian food as rich since the region has plenty of resources, and these natural ingredients are cheap. Prof. Dr. Shahrim shared that he enjoys traditional cuisine because it is natural, simple, and uses fresh ingredients. It does not contain processed food and is not complicated to make.

Prof. Dr. Shahrim highlighted the nutritious ingredients of the *Asam Rebus Keladi*, which came from his backyard. The main ingredient of the stew is Yam, which is highly nutritious, popular, and savored in many countries in Asia, as it is affordable and versatile. It also includes garlic, dried chili, ginger, turmeric, shallots, red onions, sliced garcinia, *kantan* (torch ginger), and Vietnamese mint for the soup base. For the fish, Prof. Dr. Shahrim used *ikan parang* (wolf herring). The *Sambal Belacan* used red chili, bird's eye chili, shrimp paste, and calamansi. Salt and sugar were the only seasonings used for the dish.

While explaining each ingredient of the stew, Prof. Dr. Shahrim encouraged the audience to know the source of the food they consume and to patronize smallhold farmers, fisherfolks, and other producers. He also showcased his kitchen utensils sourced from artisans working with sustainable materials, which he likewise supports.

Prof. Dr. Shahrim suggests growing food at home as it is more accessible and is the most reliable food source. He also noted that the pandemic has changed people's perspectives on sustainable consumption and led to the growing interest in food gardens, which he hopes could be sustained even after the pandemic.

A DAAD-SEARCA Scholar also joined the discussion on sustainable and healthy food. Ms. Gita Addelia Nevara shared her study on the Valorization of Oilseed by-products for sustainable and healthy consumption. The study suggests the processing of defatted oilseeds as functional ingredients in various food products, which could be a positive approach in reducing the environmental and economic impact of food waste. Gita also shared some ideas on how we could eat more sustainably. She is currently a PhD Candidate in Food Science under the Department of Food Science, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, UPM.

Finally, the conversation on sustainable and healthy consumption highlighted that it is up to a person's conscious choice on what to eat. Prof. Dr. Shahrim recommends creating awareness, educating, and training children as early as possible so they could practice consuming sustainable and healthy food options while growing up.

Outstanding SEARCA scholar awardee shares his passion for saving the Indonesian waters



Dr. Muhammad Reza Cordova, Tokyo NODAI-SEARCA alumnus, shared his study on macro and microplastics debris in Indonesian water during the Special Graduate Seminar on 24 September 2021.

The Education and Collective Learning Department (ECLD) conducted a Special Graduate Seminar on 24 September 2021 with Dr. Muhammad Reza Cordova sharing his dissertation on macro and microplastics debris in Indonesian water. The online seminar was conducted under the SEARCA Online Learning and Virtual Engagement (SOLVE) platform.

Dr. Cordova is a SEARCA alumnus under the Tokyo NODAI-SEARCA Joint Scholarship. He recently earned his PhD in Aquatic Bioscience at Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI).

Dr. Cordova talked about the inflow of riverine plastic debris and the quantification and identification of microplastics in the marine ecosystem. Based on his study, single-use plastics such as Styrofoam dominate the microplastic debris found in Jakarta's riverine outlets. The onset of the pandemic resulted in the presence of personal protective equipment (PPE) and similar land-derived debris. Various sizes and shapes of microplastics were present in the water surface, sediment, and marine organism. These microplastics were higher in areas closer to the land where the debris originates.

Based on the results of the study, Dr. Cordova recommends further understanding of the source, pathway, the ecological, societal, and economic impact of marine debris using long-term monitoring data. There is also a need to investigate the impact of microplastics on fish and macrobenthic invertebrates. Further research would also help Indonesia address plastic pollution.

Besides his research results, Dr. Cordova also shared his journey as a SEARCA scholar and his experience when the pandemic hit towards the end of his studies. His interest in plastic wastes in rivers and bridges started in 2004 which culminated in his PhD journey in 2015 and a dissertation on the current conditions and problems besetting macro and microplastics debris in Indonesian waters.

Dr. Cordova is a prolific researcher, publishing eight (8) articles in scientific journals and contributing to books and other academic publications during his studies. He also worked on the Guidelines for Harmonizing Ocean Surface Microplastic Monitoring Methods which was published by the Ministry of Environment in Japan. Dr. Cordova was part of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences research team that received the Hitachi Global Foundation Asia 2020 Best Innovation Award and a runner-up to the Berita Satu's People and Innovation Award 2020 in Science and Technology. Because of his accomplishments during his studies, SEARCA awarded him as the Outstanding PhD Scholar for AY 2020-2021 during the Testimonial Program for SEARCA Scholars held on 12 August 2021.

Today, Dr. Cordova is a researcher at the Research Center for Oceanography, Indonesian Institute of Sciences. His research interests include distribution, temporal and seasonal variations, dynamics, associations with other types of pollutants and their impacts, as well as solutions to problems of marine litter, ranging from large size waste to microscopic size, e.g., micro and nano sizes, and heavy metals. Dr. Cordova also has experience as a lecturer in several universities in Indonesia and industrial experience as an environmental impact assessment consultant and evaluator. He disseminates his research results to mass media such as the television, radio, and newspapers in Southeast Asia to bridge research, the government, and the public.

SEARCA's Special Graduate Seminar is held once every semester and highlights outstanding research by scholars from their graduate thesis. Hosting the seminar is the Center's way to support the scholars' academic milestones and to recognize their capacity to produce quality research that has a great impact on agriculture and rural development.



Dr. Cordova also shared his journey as a scholar until he earned his PhD in Aquatic Bioscience at Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI).



Dr. Cordova is currently a researcher at the Research Center for Oceanography, Indonesian Institute of Sciences.

Conquering challenges with IPB University's Prof. Dr. Khaswar Syamsu

Prof. Dr. Ir. Khaswar Syamsu, a Professor and the Head of the Bioindustry Division at the Department of Agroindustrial Engineering, IPB University in Bogor, Indonesia, was awarded a SEARCA Regional Professorial Chair Grant for AY 2021-2022. The award was granted to him in recognition of his contributions in the field of agricultural technology and innovation. Prof. Dr. Khaswar is also currently IPB University's Head of the Bioprocess Engineering Laboratory at the Research Center for Bioresources and Biotechnology, and the Director of Halal Science Center. According to him, receiving the grant is a form of acknowledgment and appreciation of his contributions to the region. SEARCA's stringent process of selecting the awardees includes evaluating the candidate's academic achievements, research, patents, publications, training, and community service engagements. To date, Prof. Dr. Khaswar is the second professor from IPB University to receive the award after Dr. Anuraga Jayanegara in 2017-2018.

Prof. Dr. Khaswar's journey in teaching was not without challenges. He enjoyed studying as a child and then passing on his knowledge to others. Prof. Dr. Khaswar came from an impoverished family and was the third child out of nine siblings, making it hard to buy learning materials. In high school, he would borrow books from a friend whose family can afford them. In exchange, he would teach his friend what he has learned.

Prof. Dr. Khaswar almost did not complete his Bachelor of Agricultural Technology at the Department of Agroindustrial Technology, IPB University in 1986 due to lack of funds for his final research project. He completed his research with the encouragement and assistance of his supervisors, who helped purchase the chemicals. It was also his undergraduate supervisor who encouraged him to apply for a lecturer position at IPB University.



Becoming a lecturer has afforded Prof. Dr. Khaswar great opportunities to expand his knowledge and creativity. He received a scholarship to pursue his Masters in Biotechnology in 1988 from the World Bank XVII through the Inter University Center (IUC) of Biotechnology at IPB University, and his PhD in Chemical Engineering through a scholarship from the Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Queensland in 1992. After receiving his PhD degree, he served as Assistant Director of Cooperation and Development at IUC Biotechnology. He also received fellowships for Post-Doctoral Research and Training at GBF Braunschweig, Germany; Cardiff University of Wales, United Kingdom; International Agricultural Center in the Netherlands; Michigan State University; and the University of California, Davis, USA.

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Creativity and innovation need to be encouraged. It will produce novelties that will enrich knowledge, allowing it to grow and develop.

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PROF. DR. IR. KHASWAR SYAMSU, MSC
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Director, Halal Science Center
Head of the Bioprocess Engineering Laboratory,
Research Center for Bioresources and Biotechnology
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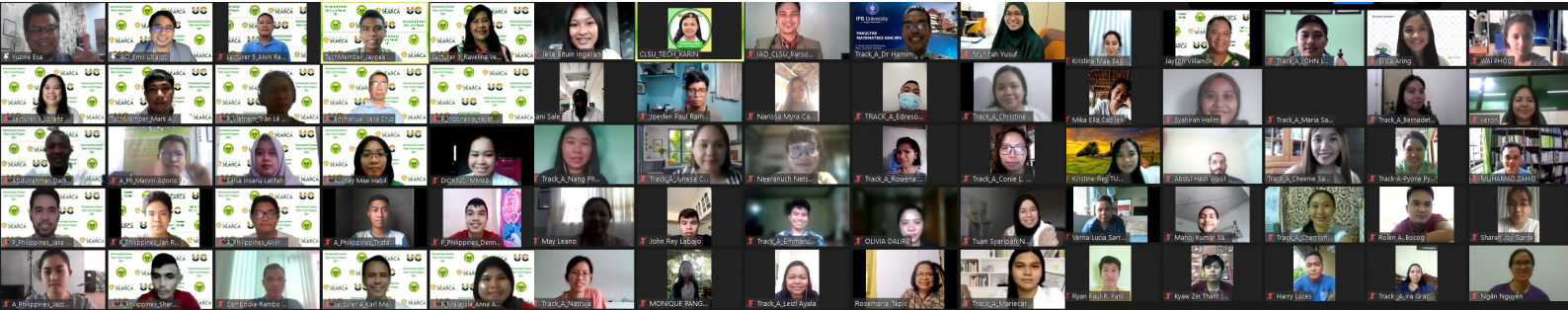
Prof. Dr. Khaswar believes that creativity and innovation need to be encouraged. It will produce novelties that will enrich knowledge, allowing it to grow and develop. Through his encouragement and guidance, Prof. Dr. Khaswar along with his colleagues and students were able to obtain 13 Patent Registration Grants, among which 11 patents have been granted.

From almost not finishing his undergraduate research, Prof. Dr. Khaswar now has contributed greatly to his country through his innovative research on environmentally friendly products such as bioplastics, bioenergy/biofuel, biofertilizers, bioinsecticides, and non-wood paper, to name a few. These research projects granted him the Patents and Most Prospective Innovations since 2008, the Extraordinary Intellectual Property Award from the Indonesian government, and a Professorship in 2009. For the past five years, Prof. Dr. Khaswar has published more than 60 articles as lead or co-author in scientific journals and was also recognized, for five consecutive years, by the Business Innovation Center established by the State Ministry of Research and Technology of Indonesia for his innovative projects.

If given the chance to create a policy that would help the agriculture sector, Prof. Dr. Khaswar envisions efficient land use for food (as a food estate) and energy (as an energy estate). If the domestic food needs are met, then food can be exported to other countries in need. The government can handle the oversupply of agricultural products by purchasing them at a fair price, storing, preserving, or processing them into value-added products. An example of this is using agriculture products containing sugar or starch as a cheaper source of bioenergy/biofuel or first generation of bioethanol. Lignocellulosic materials as by-products or waste can also be processed as second generation of bioethanol.

The pursuit for a renewable energy source has been the rationale of Prof. Dr. Khaswar's presentation on "Increased Bioethanol Production Directly from Sweet Sorghum Bagasse using Mold and Yeast" on July 6, 2021, during his public lecture as part of the SEARCA Regional Professorial Chair Grant. He discussed the production techniques of bioethanol from sweet sorghum bagasse using mold and yeast through Engineered Simultaneous Saccharification and Fermentation or SSF. This alternative energy source can solve scarcity in energy, and it will not compete with food materials.

Prof. Dr. Khaswar further plans to expand his research on other bioethanol production techniques. He believes that through bioprocess engineering, the challenges of using lignocellulose can be solved. He also hopes to share his knowledge and research studies with fellow lecturers, researchers, and the youth, to inspire them to create innovative technologies for the development of their country.



CLSU spearheads the International Summer Short-Term Course with the UC and SEARCA

The Central Luzon State University (CLSU), in cooperation with the UC and SEARCA, co-organized the International Summer Short-Term Course on mushroom farming, organic agriculture, aquaculture, and transboundary animal diseases from 19-29 July 2021.

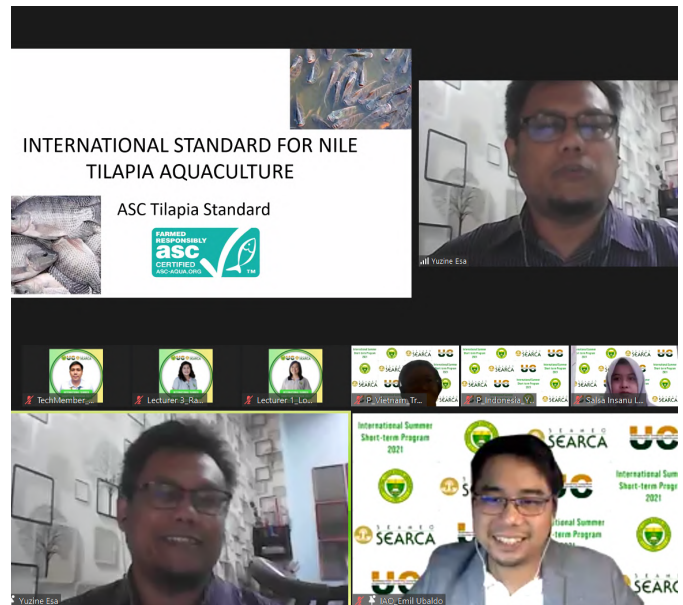
During its opening program on 19 July, Dr. Edgar A. Orden, University President of CLSU, welcomed the participants to their course offering which highlights the mastery of concepts and skills relevant to the student's field of interest through the diverse training tracks. Dr. Renato G. Reyes, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Director of the International Affairs Office, provided an overview of the whole program, which also integrates lectures on Filipino culture, traditions, music, and cuisine. In addition, the course includes a virtual tour to introduce CLSU to the attendees.

Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, Program Head of the Education and Collective Learning Department, conducted an information session about SEARCA and the UC. CLSU became an Affiliate Member of the UC this 2021, and this is the first joint activity of the university with the consortium. From more than 800 participants, one hundred twenty-six (126) students are from the UC member institutions. CLSU also invited experts from IPB University and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) to conduct special lectures for the attendees on 23 July 2021.

Dr. Ir. Hamin, M.Si, from IPB University, discussed Organic and Sustainable Farming: A Global Perspective. He shared that modern agricultural practices rely heavily on intensive cultivation, monoculture, higher off-farm input such as fertilizers and pesticides, and heavy machines. The dependency on fertilizers and pesticides results in negative impacts on the environment such as increase in toxicity, decrease in biodiversity, low soil fertility, low organic materials, and low microorganisms. Organic and sustainable farming can be a solution to this as described by the USDA National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) since it sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. This practice also promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It also minimizes the use of off-farm inputs, and restores, maintains, and enhances ecological harmony.

The increasing awareness of organic and sustainable farming can be attributed to its health benefits, environmental contribution, resource sustainability, as well as the growing organic community composed of farmer organizations, organic traders, organic consumers, NGOs, and cooperatives. Dr. Hamim also presented statistics on organic agriculture per area, the sale of organic products, and market which showed a growing trend in the past decade.

Some of the global issues and challenges faced by organic farming includes productivity, market, price, certification, network, and government policy. Dr. Hamim highlighted the importance of network and partnership in sustaining organic farming practices.



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yuzine Esa from UPM discussed International Standards, Policies, and Best Practices in Aquaculture. He first presented the seven ASC Tilapia Farming Standards. These standards include compliance to the law and regulations, managing the farm site to conserve the natural habitat and local biodiversity, conserving water resources, conserving diversity and wild populations, using resources responsibly, managing fish health and welfare in an environmentally responsible manner, and becoming socially responsible in tilapia farming.

Prof. Dr. Yuzine also tackled policies in aquaculture which are embedded in national fisheries or agriculture policies such as in Malaysia with the state-level National Agro-Food Policy (NAFP). However, there is no specific policy on tilapia aquaculture. The ASEAN also established the Resolution on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2030. ASEAN likewise provided the Guidelines on Good Aquaculture Practices (ASEAN GAQP) for Food Fish.

In terms of best aquaculture practices for tilapia farming, Prof. Dr. Yuzine focused on four key issues such as the community, environment, animal welfare, and food safety. On community issues, tilapia farming should comply with property rights and regulations, community relationships, and adhere to human resource safety and employee relationships. The protection of the environment includes wetland conservation, global resources conservation, soil and water conservation, managing escapes, non-native stocks, genetically modified organisms, and the proper storage and disposal of farm supplies. Animal welfare pertains to tilapia husbandry, while food safety involves microbial sanitation, harvest, and transport.

Crucial to these best practices is product traceability which includes efficient record keeping. This ensures that all steps in the production process comply with environmental, social, and food safety standards. Data that should be compiled for each culture unit per production cycle include an identification number, volume or surface area, stocking rate, source of fingerlings, antibiotic and drug use, pesticide use, harvest date, harvest quantity, and processing plant or purchaser.

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