

An Experience at the 1st International Agriculture Student Symposium

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It was a great opportunity when UMS sent us for the first International Agriculture Student Symposium (IASS) held at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) from 4th to 13th January 2009. I think it was a good decision and a way to promote UMS to foreign students and also to make them aware of the School of Sustainable Agriculture (SSA) at UMS.

In the beginning, I was not really interested to join the symposium because we were informed only during the week of the final exam (November). I even requested that my name be placed at the bottom of the list of interested participants. However, only Adam, Fabian, Ricky, Nurul Azuwa and I took the chance to benefit from the opportunities that the IASS could offer.

On the first day, we arrived at the KL-LCCT Airport at 12.40 pm, where we received a warm welcome from five UPM students who were the IASS organizing committee members. We were taken to our accommodation at Kolej 17, the new student hostel which caters for UPM Medical students. To my knowledge, we were the first group to register followed by the Groups from Indonesia and Japan. Thailand was supposed to send their representative but had to withdraw at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. That night, the organizers treated us to a nice reception dinner at the mini hall in UPM's Agriculture Faculty.

There were no major events on the second day (5th January) apart from visiting MARDI headquarters in Serdang (adjacent to UPM) and Putrajaya. The reason could have been to give all the participants a chance to adapt to the new environment and at the same time, to explore Malaysia, especially for the foreign students.

The third day was the opening ceremony officiated by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry. The event became more exciting in the afternoon with the initiation of the forum entitled 'The Role of Agriculture in Global Food Crises'. The forum was chaired by Professor Dr. Khanif Yusop as moderator with four panels represented by undergraduate students from UPM, UMS, IPB Bogor, Indonesia and Nigata University of Japan. Fabian Lim (UMS) performed well in this forum which defended the great role of agriculture in combating the Global food crises using the analogy "no agriculture no future". There were hot arguments and debates amongst the panels on the cause, effect and solution for the food crisis. The day long event did not end there but instead we were again entertained with cultural performances in the evening to show the

cultural diversity of Malaysia.

The following days (7th-9th) were the most crucial days of the symposium, whereby all the participants presented their papers. The topics covered food, environment, entrepreneurship and agriculture technology. Participants comprised 8 undergraduates, 4 postgraduates and 2 PhD students from UPM plus 5 undergraduate students from UMS with two papers; 3 undergraduate students from Nigata University (NU) Japan and 13 undergraduate students from Bogor Agriculture University (IPB). The two papers presented by the UMS representatives were 'Sustainable Agriculture' by myself and 'How free trade affects the Agriculture sectors in Southeast Asia' by Fabian Lim and Ricky Toong. We were given 25 minutes to deliver our presentation with five minutes reserved for the question and answer session. As for me, it was my first experience presenting a paper at an international symposium. To be honest, I was shaking at the start but I convinced myself that what I was supposed to deliver was more important than my fear. I gained strength and confidence as I started to talk. I recited the analogy mentioned previously by presenters and the moderator saying "No Money No Honey", "No Agriculture, No Future" and I completed these statements by saying "There'll Be No Future Without Sustainable Agriculture".

Through this symposium, I found that there are lots of things that are valuable to each and every one of us in the field of agriculture. The aim, "to promote sharing of ideas and experiences amongst students in agriculture across the globe" as stated in the IASS objective really inspired me and all the participants. I'm impressed by the commitment of the students from Bogor Agriculture University, their level of confidence and cooperation is far higher than ours. Some of them are just first year students but the way they presented their papers seemed more like final year students. Language barrier; especially the ability to talk fluent English can be a major obstacle amongst our students nowadays



Welcoming At the Airport



Forum- Fabian Lim "No Agriculture No Future"



Presentation "There'll Be No Future Without Sustainable Agriculture"

which prevents us from joining or participating in programmes such as the IASS conference. During this symposium, I noticed that there are participants who do not have a good command of English but do not let it stop them from standing in front and presenting their paper. If people like them can do it, why can't we. Let's break the barrier and face the challenges ahead!

There're still a lot more to talk about the symposium but I would rather make it simple and easy. I would like to encourage everyone (especially SPL students) to take the opportunity in the future while the chance is still in your hands.

Lastly, I'd like to take this opportunity to convey our sincere appreciation and thanks to UMS for giving us the opportunity and funding; to the Dean of SPL, Prof. Dr. Ridzwan Abdul Rahman and Prof. Madya (Datin) Dr. Mariam Abd. Latip, thank you for your support; to student affairs (HEP) office, SPL staff, your assistance is highly appreciated.