

UMS research on oil palm cancer

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Dr Chong:
Lead researcher.

KOTA KINABALU: Malaysian oil palm plantations lose about US\$500 million (about RM1,600 million) a year to a devastating disease known as Basal Stem Rot (BSR) or in plain language, cancer of oil palm, caused by *Ganoderma boninense*, with no remedy reported so far.

The crippling disease with no solution in sight threatens a key economic sector in Malaysia which accounts for 39pc of palm oil production and 44pc of world exports or 12pc and 27pc of the world's total production and exports of oils and fats, plus its employment of a million people.

Cancerous attacks which often cause oil palm trees to collapse in their prime is definitely bad news to Sabah which has committed 1.5 million hectares of land use to oil palm.

The earnest search for an innovative and effective answer to halt the advances of *ganoderma* is on.

On Tuesday, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) represented by its leading research microbiologists such as Dr Chong Khim Phin and his R&D team signed a Letter of Agreement (LOA) with Kam Cheong Plantation Sdn Bhd and Agri-Biotech Marketing Sdn Bhd, a company which advocates the essential needs of planters to protect plants from diseases and to grow crops in a manner that enhances the health of the soil, plant and environment.

"I am delighted to know our Sustainable Palm Oil Research Unit (SPOR) has been proactive to work together with the oil palm industry hand in hand in tackling this important issue which definitely is going to benefit the industry," said UMS Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah, through UMS Registrar, Datuk Abdullah Mohd Said, at the LOA signing ceremony.

The Vice Chancellor praised Agri-Biotech Marketing and Kam Cheong Plantations for have jointly committed funds totalling RM153,200 in researching for a better alternative in managing *Ganoderma boninense*.

"More importantly, the trust given to UMS as one of the leading higher learning institutions in Malaysia," the Vice Chancellor pointed out.

"Basal Stem Rot (BSR) caused by *Ganoderma boninense* remains the major disease threatening the productivity of oil palm in Southeast Asia," said Dr Chong, a main driver of the R&D research project in UMS' Sustainable Oil Palm Research Unit.

"The loss due to this disease is great and can reach as high as RM2 billion a year in Malaysia," Dr Chong pointed out.

"The focus in managing this disease mainly falls in two categories which are the detection and control of this devastating pathogen," he added.

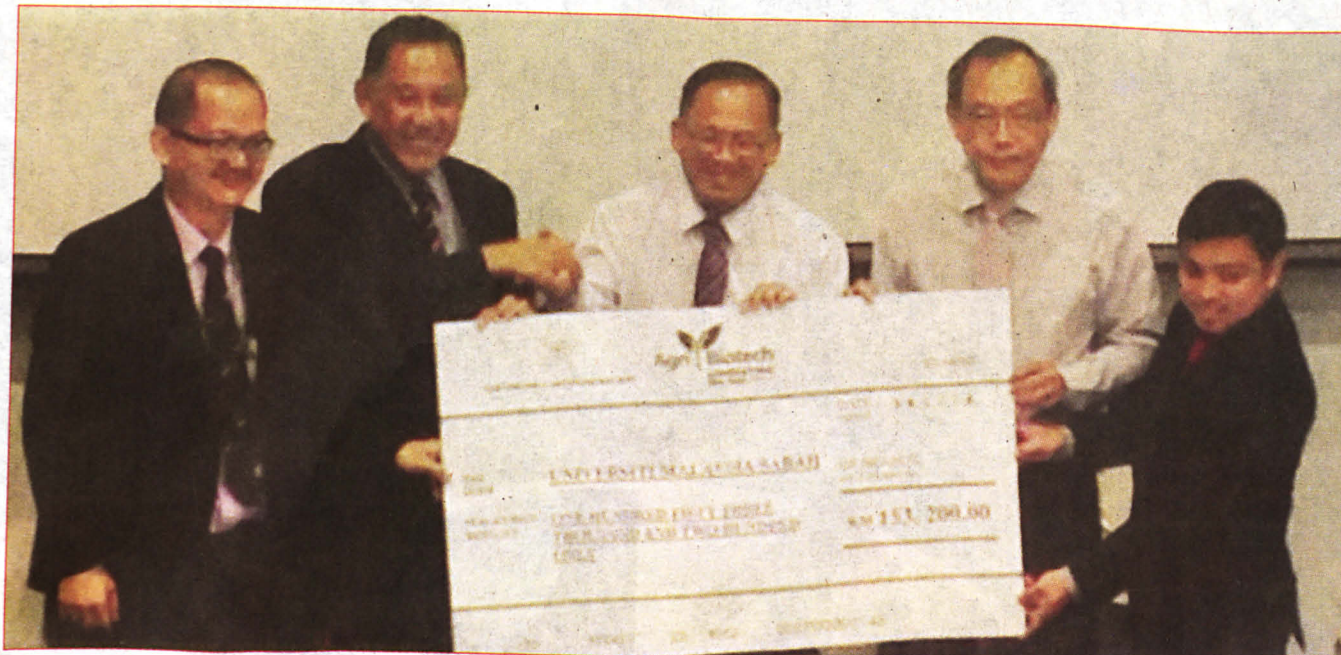
"Numerous detection and control methods currently are available in the market but none has shown to be promising," Dr Chong asserted.

Engano 211 is a product of Singapore and distributed by Agri-Biotech Marketing Sdn Bhd.

It is a combination of organic acids and has shown some qualitative results and symptoms in limiting the colonisation of *Ganoderma* in treated oil palms, company sources claimed.

However, more thorough investigation needs to be carried out to further quantify, understand and scientifically prove the effectiveness of this product and to promote the product to greater height for the benefit of the industry, Dr Chong opined.

The project came as a result of Agri-Biotech taking the first move to approach UMS and Kam Cheong Plantations to carry out a holistic research for the product.



The presentation of mock cheque for RM153,000 to UMS.