

Varsity Students' Ideas on Palm Oil Industry Sustainability Bear Fruit



By Saiful Bahri Kamaruddin
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BANGI, 18 November 2015 – The National University of Malaysia (UKM) has won second prize in a competition open to university students aimed at developing innovative ideas on sustainability of the palm oil industry.

The team from UKM won RM5,000 sponsored by the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) in the competition known as the Sustainability Challenge. Initiated by UKM and the Sime Darby Foundation (UKM-YSD) Chair for Sustainable Development: Zero Waste Technology.

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) took the top prize with RM8,000 prize money while Universiti Malaysia Sabah was placed third and received RM3,000 cash prize.

The prizes were given away by UKM Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Industry and Community Partnership) Prof Dr Imran Ho Abdullah and UKM-YSD non-independent non-executive Director Tan Sri Dato' Dr Wan Mohd Zahid Noordin, here today.

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Dr Wan Mohd Zahid said its partnership with UKM has been very fruitful.

"I picked UKM because it came up with the most creative ideas," he said.

Also present at the prize-giving ceremony was Prof Datuk Dr Sharifah Mastura Syed Abdullah, the Director of the Institute of Climate Change (IP), who was on the panel of judges, and Prof Ir Dr Mohd Sobri Takriff, the chairman of the Sustainability Challenge.

"We selected the ten best entries. Those selected are the most innovative and most unique.

"In the sustainability challenge, participants – either as individuals or as a team – have to submit innovative and creative ideas in the form of essay about ways of improving sustainability in the palm oil industry.

"This competition provides an excellent opportunity for the participants to present their sustainability ideas to the private sector for further research and development," said Prof Sobri.

Ten best entries will be shortlisted for the presentation and assessment in the final round.

Chief Judge Hj Shawaluddin Tahiruddin said some of the entries were quite interesting and could be viable projects in the future.

"To evaluate ten very varied and innovative submission has been quite compelling. They can be further developed," he said.

The champion USM came up with an idea to use a custom-built Sterling engine to generate electricity powered by heat from the steam released by the process of palm-oil fruit being boiled.

UKM proposed extracting a complex sugar, known as Furan dimethyl acetyl, (FDA) from oil palm tree trunks to be used as an anti-cancer compound similar to Curcumin.

UKM had received an endowment fund of RM15 million from YSD with the aim of leading and directing research that is relevant to palm oil industry to aspire Malaysia to be a model for sustainable development for the world.

With the collaboration of Sime Darby Plantation, UKM is carrying out research for improvements that can be made to increase the value-added products from the industry, as well as reduce green house gas emissions.

These improvements include green technology and innovative practices, ultimately leading to zero waste to

the ground, air, and water. 

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