

STUDY VISIT

UPM exposes students to Thai agro development strategies

TO better understand agriculture scenarios in other countries that have similar climate and land use for agriculture as that of Malaysia, 25 students pursuing the Master of Land Resource Management (LARM) programme at Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Faculty of Agriculture conducted an academic visit to the Chulalongkorn University's School of Agricultural Resources in Bangkok, Thailand recently.

The visit's goal was to expose the students to the agricultural development strategies in Thailand, one of the largest food producers in the world.

The students, who were accompanied by two UPM lecturers, Dr Daljit Singh and Dr Mohd Rizal Ariffin, were greeted by the school's dean, Professor Dr Kanisak Oraveerakul.

Kanisak said the School of Agricultural Resources was set up some 10 years ago, and it paved the way for students to better understand and explore their potential in improving Thailand's agricultural sector.

"The young generation of students that are energetic, creative and innovative are an important resource in empowering the agricultural sector.

"Mastery of science and technology are crucial in the agriculture field, which enable students to carry out agriculture-based projects," Kanisak added. He said one of the successful graduate projects from the university was the Khao Yai — The Mango House Farm, a garden located at Nong Nam Daeng in Nakhon Ratchasima, which is a centre for mango enthusiasts.

It has a bistro that serves mango-based food and beverages, and sell mangoes that come directly from farms. It also sells mango-based products online.

There are over 8,000 mango trees in the garden together with other fruits, such as dragon fruits and papayas. The garden was awarded the Good Agricultural Practice certification, and is one of the many tourist attractions in Nong Nam Daeng.

Another successful student project is the Advanced Pig Farm in Thung Kham, Nan Province.

The project took eight months to complete, and students from the Chulalongkorn University helped pig farmers to increase pork distribution in the province by applying eco-friendly concepts.



UPM lecturers Dr Daljit Singh (left), Malaysian Agriculture Attache in Bangkok Mohamad Ezri Shamsuddin (second from left) and Dr Mohd Rizal Ariffin (right) with LARM students at the Royal Project Coffee Shop. The shop is part of an initiative by the Thai royalty.

LARM students also visited the Soil Museum at Thailand's Land Development Department, which featured a collection of land profiles taken from all over the country.

These land profiles depict the condition and composition of land in Thailand, namely for the reference of land managers and people who are interested in understanding soil fertility and knowing the suitability of planting.

The group then went to an agricultural museum known as the Golden Jubilee of Agriculture.

It displays the agricultural timeline in the country, which answers the question of why Thailand is so obsessed with agriculture although their execution is through conventional methods as 90 per cent of farmers in the country practise traditional agriculture.

Malaysian Agriculture Attache in Bangkok Mohamad Ezri Shamsuddin explained to the students that the father of the present Thai King, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, put great emphasis on the adequacy of food on his people.

"His Majesty's administration needed to ensure that every citizen has sufficient food, and any surplus could be sold to others," he said.

LARM student leader Wan Abdul Hadi Wan Mohd Shafie said although the use of the latest technologies could improve agricultural productivity, Thais had proven that optimal use of

“His Majesty's administration needed to ensure that every citizen has sufficient food, and any surplus could be sold to others.”

MOHAMAD EZRI SHAMSUDDIN
Malaysian Agriculture Attache in Bangkok



LARM students observing paddy grown in large scale.

agricultural land and sustainable development could ensure their food sovereignty.

"Investment in the latest machinery or equipment does not necessarily guarantee a big return. What is important is human development, that is the earnestness and determination of farmers to produce farm produce following the best agricultural practice in their gardens or plots of land," he said.

He added that there were business opportunities available for those who wish to become entrepreneurs.

One of the most successful business is the Royal Project Shop, a centre for the collection and distribution of products based on agriculture.

Domestic and foreign study visits are a key component in the LARM programme. It offers students an opportunity to view and compare land resource management practises.



Sample of paddy crop displayed at the agriculture museum.