

## Oils and Fats International Congress (OFIC) 2022

The Malaysian Oil Scientists' & Technologists' Association (MOSTA) 15th OFIC 2022 and Exhibition was held from 18-19 October 2022 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. Launched in 1994 it brings research scientists and technologists, academics, industrialists and government agencies together to review the latest technological progress. This year the theme was “Boosting the Potential of Oil Palm and Its Products.”

In his opening speech Academician Emeritus Prof. Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Augustine S. H. Ong, President, MOSTA, proposed the establishment of a strategic fund of RM20 million annually for three years to incentivise productivity improvements, technological developments and innovations across the oil palm industry, including the use of biomass for energy supply.



Academician Emeritus Prof. Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Augustine S. H. Ong delivering his opening speech

Mechanisation took centre stage with the keynote address on the first day by Prof SangBae Kim, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States of America on “Robots With Physical Intelligence” where he demonstrated how challenging it is for robots to do what humans do and take for granted. The second day started on the same theme with Mr Helmy Othman Basha, Sime Darby Plantation Bhd, Malaysia speaking on “The Great Leap Forward: Reimagining Plantations” where he shared that they have successfully mechanised several tasks across its Malaysian plantation operations and expects to eliminate the need for manual workers in all non-harvesting activities by the end of 2023. Also the company hopes to improve its land-to-man ratio to 1:17.5 or one worker for every 17.5 hectares by the end of 2024. The current industry average is one worker for every eight hectares.

The in demand OFIC Evening Forum was back, invariably moderated by Mr M R Chandran, Vice-President of MOSTA. The topic was Environmental Impacts of the palm oil industry: Addressing sustainability gaps on the road to net-zero carbon. The panel was made up of distinguished personalities from the region.



Evening forum panel members L to R: Ir Qua Kiat Seng, *Monash University, Malaysia*  
Dr Harikrishna Kulaveerasingam, *Sime Darby Plantation Bhd, Malaysia* Dr Puah Chiew Wei, *Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries, Indonesia* Mr M R Chandran, Mr Jeremy Goon, *Wilmar International Ltd, Singapore* Dr Julian McGill, *LMC International, United Kingdom* and Dr Gary W Theseira, *Malaysia Green Technology and Climate Change Centre*

It was acknowledged that whilst the oil palm is a tree and a plantation is not a forest, the oil palm sequesters carbon dioxide and produces abundant biomass which is a key to closing the gap to net-zero. It was encouraging to see many plantation companies measuring their GHG emissions and taking steps to reduce their GHG emissions. More companies should collaborate and act.

The work in genomics of MPOB and Sime Darby Plantations came across very strongly. Dr Leslie Low Eng Ti of MPOB was able to use it to explain why oil palm yields have remained stagnant pointing the reason to high non-tenera contaminants. In this field one researcher was prominent during the Congress who besides presenting received a couple of awards viz the 2022 Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Augustine S H International Special Award on Innovations and Inventions in Palm Oil as well as the 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award. She is none other than Dr. Ravigadevi Sambanthamurthi and her dedication to her work came across robustly in her acceptance speech which is an inspiration to aspiring researchers.

There were nearly 30 poster presentations and more than 20 virtual poster presentations. Academician Emeritus Prof. Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Augustine S. H. Ong was pleased to see so much work from young researchers as it bodes well for the palm oil industry and this year's congress theme.

OFIC 2024 will be 22-23 October 2024 with the theme Palm Oil Industry: Towards Circular Economy.