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Mini Seminar Road to Agribusiness Marketing Conference 2023: Perspective from the Stakeholders

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A mini-seminar was held on the 20 of December 2022 by FAMA (Federal Agricultural Authority Marketing) via an online platform and broadcasting through other online social media. The event is a first-time collaboration to conduct an online event involving the local authorities, industrial partners, researchers, and other stakeholders. A well-known publisher (Emerald Publishing) and a Non-Profit Organization (Sarawak Research Society) have acted as co-organizers for the mini-seminar on the topic of “Sustaining Food Security Through Agrifood Marketing.” The initiative for such an event is to promote the future large-scale conference organized by FAMA in 2023 and, at the same time, increase the awareness of stakeholders toward the research contribution made by FAMA in agriculture, business, and marketing. Governments have historically placed a high priority on food policy (Godfray & Garnett, 2014). The theme of “Sustaining Food Security through Agrifood Marketing” was an effort to raise awareness and concern about food resources, land, and government policies. The issue of food sustainability remains an issue for its populations and industries today (The Star, 2022). Hence, it is essential to look into the perspective of the local authorities, business owners, consumers, and other stakeholders in handling the issue of food resources and the supply chain.

The seminar organizer has invited industrial experts and researchers to participate and share their knowledge throughout the keynotes and working papers presentation session. The strong alignment of the conference theme was showcased in the academic sharing session and keynote speeches, with discussions focused on topics such as the role of food security, challenges in food security from the marketing perspective, the issues and policy of food security, and smart farming, among others. Mdm. Wan Faizatul Aniza Binti Ismayatim addressed the opening ceremony. She is a Senior Director of Strategic Planning, FAMA. She shared her thoughts about the importance of food security issues and how agricultural and food management assist in maintaining the sustainability of the resources.

The opening speech was then followed by the invitation of the first keynote speaker Yang Berbahagia. Prof Datuk Dr. Mad Nasir Shamsudin is an agricultural economist and a member of the National Agricultural Advisory on Food Security and Policy Options. He shared with the participants the emerging economic trend during the post-pandemic era and the issues with food security. He then expanded his idea on the current situation in Malaysia and proposed sustainable food security policy options. This session ended with a great discussion from the participants, and a few questions on food policy, the role of local authorities such as FAMA, and food supply chain issues were addressed by the speaker.

The keynote speaker for the second session was delivered by Dr. Peter J. Batt, an Agribusiness Marketing and Rural Development Consultant. He is also an adjunct Professor at the University of the Philippines Mindanao and an Honorary Research Fellow at Nanjing Agricultural University and the University of Western Australia. He shared with the participants the essential concepts of agribusiness and food security through the lens of food availability, access, and utilization. He also highlighted the importance of food security and market-driven instruments to enhance the stability of food security. During the question and answer session, Dr. Peter J. Batt addressed the extension agent's importance in ensuring food security and the rising ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) expectations from investors and consumers.

The keynote speech was then followed by the academic session on sharing their research papers pertaining to food security and future trend of agribusiness marketing. The first working paper was shared by Professor Dr. Norsida Man from the Faculty of Agriculture, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She shared her research on overcoming supply chain challenges for food Security with digital technologies. She indicated that agriculture demonstrates different roles from diverse perspectives (economy, tourism, and education). She then extended her perceptions on the challenges in modern agriculture, global food security, and the essentials of supply chain risk management. She also stated that because Malaysia depends on imports to sustain its food supply, particularly for rice, the country is still susceptible to future food instability. During the discussion session, Professor Dr. Norsida Man shared her insight on the approaches to overcoming local demands and needs for local ingredients and production.

After a short break, the sharing of research work has been placed with Dr. Tan Boon Chin presenting his research paper. The study focused on the local bananas' sustainability in the banana market. Dr. Tan is currently a Deputy Director of the Centre for Research in Biotechnology for Agriculture (CEBAR), at the University of Malaya. He addressed climate change issues and the world population during the sharing session. Evidence on these issues had been provided, which then led to the discussion of food security, food and nutrition security, and banana. Based on the research and data obtained in 2020, Malaysia is the 53rd largest global exporter of bananas. It was also highlighted that Malaysia portrays strengths and opportunities in the production and supply of bananas through the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

The third academic session was then proceeded with a sharing session by Dr. Gabriel Wee, a Lecturer from Swinburne University of Technology, Malaysia. He is also an entrepreneur for Sarawak's local agriculture and aquaculture inputs supply company. He shared insights on harnessing agritech for food security and provided an overview of the concepts of smart farming technology (SFT) based on literature. The findings indicated that SFT is the most popular among farmers between 31 – 40 years old, and more than 40% of commercial farmers have adopted some form of SFT. Nevertheless, fewer than 20% of smallholder farmers have implemented SFT. Based on his sharing, he concluded that there is a need to have targeted support and interventions by the government and key industry players to foster the expansion of SFT in Malaysia.

Associate Professor Mia Bella R. Fresnido presented the final sharing of the research paper with the topic: Contextualizing the Role of Stingless Bee Honey (SBH) in Melitourism. She is currently the Associate Professor I, from the College of Economics and Management, Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines. Through her sharing session, Associate Professor Mia addressed the essentials of beekeeping in the Philippines while introducing the concept of “Melitourism”. Her research demonstrated that tourism and agritourism are important components of

Melitourism Social Enterprise (MSE). She had highlighted stingless bees as an innovative approach in food and agritourism and the efforts made by the local authority to support the farmers.

The final keynote session is delivered by Dato' Mohamad Mustahapa bin Awang, the Deputy Director General (Development), FAMA. Yang Berbahagia Dato' was also awarded the Standard Chartered Gold Award in 1994 and is a certified speaker who holds a Master Trainers Certificate from the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF). In the final session, he discussed the issue of food security from a marketing viewpoint, which is intricately linked to the organisers' and mini seminar's goals. The interesting part of the session is the speaker linked the discussion of food security from the economy and marketing point of view (cost margin and marketing margin). Such discussion provides new insight to the local authorities and other stakeholders about the importance of food security from diverse local and global perspectives. A few key highlights and emerging issues in Malaysia had been discussed with the appropriate strategies implemented by FAMA to overcome the challenges in supply chain management.

The mini-seminar provided deeper insights to stakeholders and academicians about food security, food utilization, and other essential elements in agribusiness and marketing. The issues of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and ESG (Environmental, social, and governance) have been frequently highlighted during the keynote speech and academic presentation sessions. Additionally, one of the important key takeaways is regarding the usage of Smart Farming Technology and Agri Tourism in the developing country context and the challenges and opportunities available in the market (En & Siew, 2022). Towards the end, the mini-conference also highlighted the future need for collaboration between local authorities, farmers, business owners, and researchers to tackle current issues pertaining to inflation, food supply, food security, supply chain management, and usage of technology in farming (Musa & Aziz, 2022; Phang et al., 2022).

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