



NEWSFLASH : Successful implementation of large-scale best management practice trials

January 31, 2013. Penang, Malaysia – The International Plant Nutrition Institute - Southeast Asia Program (IPNI SEAP), together with its partner plantations, has successfully developed a process to deploy best management practices (BMPs) for oil palm intensification. Large-scale plantation trials, that use commercial blocks and are structured to account for commercial management processes, were conducted by IPNI and demonstrated yield increases even on already well-managed mature plantations. By using this process to deploy BMPs, IPNI has been able to improve overall productivity in a relatively short period of time.

“Large-scale trials are not too difficult to implement, require little modification of commercial operations and day-to-day management of the plantations involved and are no more costlier than small-scale trials”, said Dr. Thomas Oberthür, IPNI Director of Southeast Asia Program. “They are best suited for studying combinations of management practices that plantation managers are usually interested in.” In this situation, small-scale plot trials can take years before being scaled up and are sometimes not reflective of commercial plantation conditions. And while scientists may not necessarily approve of the lack of well-defined parameters with which to assign the benefits, the obvious increase in yield is sufficient proof for plantation staff who see clear results in these trials.

While this approach to evaluating new technology and methods may not be the most effective in understanding how individual factors influence productivity, the approach allows for flexibility. Once the BMPs are applied to develop an improved overall system, operational research principles can be used to further explain the role of each factor separately. For instance, a plantation that adopts the IPNI-recommended process may want to consider the efficacy of changed fertilizer rates as a way to further increase productivity. This can be tested by fertilizing a number of blocks with higher or lower rates, and comparing them with standard blocks. While the process requires excellent record-keeping and careful analysis of results, the validity of any conclusions on one plantation can be reinforced by corroboration from other plantations.

Based on the success of this BMP research, IPNI SEAP develops with plantation partners a system known as Plantation Intelligence. Plantation Intelligence is a process that brings together a group of companies, or estates, or divisions, or growers, evaluating a range of practices at the commercial block level, followed by sharing of the information to compare results. The knowledge generated by such a system can then be used to further improve commercial practice; and the whole cycle of evaluation, information sharing, appraisal and adoption of innovative practices begins again. The power of information provided by Plantation Intelligence increases with an increasing number of participating growers as the validity of any conclusion on one plantation can be reinforced with data from other plantations. Therefore, leadership and coordination of the process by a recognized and trusted industrywide organization will benefit Plantation Intelligence by increasing the number of growers that may want to contribute information.

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About IPNI

The International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI) is a not-for-profit, science-based organization dedicated to the responsible management of plant nutrition for the benefit of people. Through cooperation and partnerships with respected institutions around the world, IPNI adds its strength to agronomic research, education, demonstrations, training, and other endeavors. Best management practices for nutrient stewardship encourage the concept of 4Rs - applying the right nutrient source, at the right rate, at the right time, and in the right place. To learn more about IPNI, please visit: www.ipni.net

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