

## MAHA 2016

The Malaysia Agriculture, Horticulture and Agrotourism (MAHA) International Show or MAHA 2016 was held for 11 days from 1st to 11th December 2016 at the Malaysia Agro Exposition Park Serdang (MAEPS), an exhibition facility with indoor and outdoor venues spanning an area of 125 hectares.

By Elaine Yim



Main Hall of MAHA 2016



The festive crowd moving between the exhibition halls

**T**he objective of this biennial event is to promote and showcase Malaysia's agro-based industries. Entrance was free. MAHA is hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture & Agro-Based Industry Malaysia (MOA). The target for MAHA 2016 was 3 million visitors (270,000 per day). MAHA 2016 highlighted the importance of food security and food sovereignty to Malaysia's future. Through MYSaveFood initiatives, it also emphasized the importance of food waste reduction.

This exhibition is huge and one visit will not cover all areas. I visited MAHA 2016 on opening day and spent the whole day there. Unfortunately, it rained in the morning and evening, hence I could not accomplish much. It rained again on my second trip. It didn't rain during my third

trip but I had to leave early when the heat became unbearable. I travelled by private car on two occasions. On the one occasion when I used public transport I took a train to Serdang KTM Station and thereafter rode on the free RapidKL bus shuttle service to the show ground.

There were four indoor exhibition halls, namely the Main Hall, Agrotrade Hall, Conference Hall and Food Empire. At the Main Hall, the exhibitions covered five themes: AgroTourism, AgroIT, AgroTrade, AgroLifestyle and AgroYouth. Agricultural products were traded at local and international levels at the Agrotrade Hall. Seminars were conducted at the Conference Hall, while the Food Empire Hall provided a wide range of cultural food stalls.

The outdoor show grounds were divided into Livestock, Machinery, Pineapple, Paddy, Fisheries, Garden District for Herbs, Garden District for Vegetables, and Floriculture. Free-of-charge shuttle service buses and trams were available to transport visitors from Gate 1 and Gate 2 entrances to the various destinations.

### LIVESTOCK

The star attraction was the 'Lembu Sado', one of which would be auctioned off at the opening price of RM 15,000 at the end of the show. There was also a contest to guess the weight of a 'Lembu Sado' and the prize was a 'Lembu Sado' worth RM 20,000.00. Many people came specially to see the 'Lembu Sado'. An adult can easily weigh more than 1,000 kg. The other meat cattle breeds that I saw were Charolais from France, Droughtmaster from Queensland and Charolais buffalo, a hybrid between the buffalo and Charolais.

Goat and sheep breeds on display included the Brazilian hair sheep Santa Ines, Barbados Blackbelly hair sheep, Jamnapari Polkadot Kaligesing, Jamnapari Senduro and Jamnapari Jawa Randu goats from India and Kalahari Polkadot goat from Africa bred for meat and milk.

Chickens were mostly paired in labelled cages. Some of the breeds on display were Japanese Bantam, Rosecomb, Sultan, Cemani, Sebright, Araucana, Brahma, Giant Cochin and Filipin. The first five are ornamental breeds while Araucana is bred for eggs, Brahma for meat Giant Cochin for meat/pet and Filipin for fighting. Beauty contests for chickens were scheduled for the ornamental chickens.



The Agricultural Bazaar near Gate 1 had many stalls selling all kinds of agricultural products



The star of the Livestock Showground was the “Lembu Sado” or Belgian Blue cattle breed



The Santa Ines is a breed of wool-less sheep reared for its meat.





A pair of ornamental chickens of the Japanese Bantam breed

There was also a bird nest industry exhibition with bird nest tasting, and an exhibition on the doves and pigeons of Malaysia.

At the Petting Zoo, young kids enjoyed playing with rabbits, goats, chickens, hens, cockerels and pygmy goats. The adorable pygmy goats can be kept as pets. There is a hobby club for them called *Kelab Peminat Kambing Pygmy Malaysia* (Pygmy Goats Fan Club of Malaysia).

### MACHINERY

Here, various types of machinery and equipment used in agriculture were exhibited.



A machine on exhibition at the Machinery Showground



A child playing with an adorable Pygmy Goat at the Petting Zoo.



Painted pineapples and real pineapple plants at the Pineapple Showground

### PINEAPPLE PLANET

The Pineapple Showground was put up by the Malaysian Pineapple Industry Board (MPIB). The main entrance was beautifully decorated

with brightly painted pineapple replicas as well as live, fruiting pineapple plants. There were no labels on the plants so I did not know what varieties they were. Inside the pineapple information hall was an exhibition detailing the history and development of the pineapple industry in Malaysia. According to an MPIB leaflet, the varieties of pineapples grown in Malaysia are Moris, N36, MD2, Moris Gajah, Gandul, Yankee, Josapine, Sarawak and Maspine.

The adjacent land, called ‘Pineapple Valley, was designed as a mini pineapple farm with row upon row of pineapple plants at different stages of development.

### **PADDY**

The walkway into the Paddy Showground by Padiberas Nasional Berhad (BERNAS), was lined with numerous posters about the rice industry in Malaysia and its importance to the country’s prosperity. Further in, visitors could see a real-life paddy field planted with Mardi Wangi 88 paddy plants at various stages of maturity from newly planted seedlings to harvest time. The mini fields were realistically presented with irrigation, complete with a resting hut and two scarecrows dressed in traditional attire. They even illustrated how the raised beds at the sides of the waterways were planted with other cash crops as an extra income earner for paddy farmers while waiting for the paddy plants to mature.

Inside an air-conditioned hall was an exhibition on the paddy industry in Malaysia. Visitors could learn more about the bugs and diseases that plague paddy plants. The different types



Paddy fields at the Paddy Showground

of equipment used in rice growing through the ages were also displayed.

Information was also provided on the nutritional values of different types of rice, healthy eating and waste reduction. There was a scaled down replica of a rice processing machine with demonstrations and explanations of how harvested paddy stalks are processed, segregated, dehusked, dried, polished, graded and packed. The different grades of white and brown rice, by-products such as husks and damaged/broken grains were also displayed..

### **FISHERIES**

The Fisheries Showground is also known as MyDOF Valley. DOF is the Department of Fisheries. There were exhibitions of fishes, fishing boats and equipment. Visitors could view life specimens and learn about the different species of freshwater fish found in Malaysian rivers such as the sebarau (*Hampala macrolepidota*), kerai kunyit (*Hypsibarbus wetmorei*), tenggalan (*Puntioplites bulu*), lampam (*Barbonymus schwanenfeldii*), patin (*Pangasius nasutus*), ketutu (*Oxyeleotris marmorata*), toman (*Channa*



*micropeltes*). and those found elsewhere in the world such as the red-bellied piranha, arapaima and alligator gar. Tuna in the House was an exhibition on tuna and tuna-like fishes found in Malaysian waters.

An interesting exhibit was the skeleton of the Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*). This whale was beached at Carey Island, Selangor on 15 March 2005. Sei whales is a critically endangered species. It is the third largest whale after the blue whale (*B. musculus*) and fin whale (*B. physalus*).

Many types of fighting fishes kept in bottles were offered for sale at booths here. Visitors could also try prawn-fishing and take part in the ‘pay and scoop some fishes home’ challenge.

### **GARDEN DISTRICT FOR HERBS and GARDEN DISTRICT FOR VEGETABLES**

These should have been the most interesting sites for gardening enthusiasts but they were not easy to find. The Garden District was located quite far from the other show grounds. There was only one bus route that stopped there. Visitors from Gate 1 or Gate 2 had to change trams somewhere in the middle of their journey. Quite a number of visitors missed this showground.

The Garden District had a section for Herbs and another for Vegetables. The Herbs Section had many different species of herb plants which were properly labelled with common names, scientific names and uses. Temperate herbs were housed inside a dome-shaped air-conditioned greenhouse. There was a stingless bee mini farm there too. Nearby, several stalls sold gardening materials and DIY gardening products.



Exhibit of the skeleton of the Sei Whale



Vertical farming

The Vegetables Section had a beautifully decorated “Green Tunnel” filled with hanging melons and gourds. *Pegaga* herb plants grown in long planter boxes decorated some resting areas. Inside the main section, there were exhibits to showcase garden ideas: vertical garden, herb garden, urban garden, pocket garden and a green kit self-watering container garden.

The Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) exhibited its “canopyecture” gardening concept with a self-fertilizing-self-watering container to grow vegetables and fruit climber plants. The plants could be arranged aesthetically to suit urban gardens limited by space constraints. A Plant

Diagnostic Clinic helped visitors with plant diseases and pest problems. Another booth sold vegetable and herb plants from the MARDI nursery.

Green World Genetics (GWG) Sdn Bhd exhibited vegetables and fruit trees grown from FI hybrid seeds such as sweet corn, orange maize, pumpkin, bitter gourd, hairy gourd and honey melon. They even had ornamental pumpkins like “Upin Ipin V74” and the “UFO V76”.

### **FLORICULTURE**

This outdoor show garden was also known as Floral World. The main attraction here was the ‘Kampung Durian Runtuh with Upin & Ipin’ agrotainment show. They had incorporated the characters of Upin & Ipin from Malaysia’s most popular animated TV series to attract children to plants and agriculture.

Further down the road after Floral World, there was a Fig Garden selling all sorts of things related to figs such as fig plants, fig fruits, fig products and gardening materials for ‘figgers’ to grow figs!

### **FAMA**

The Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) was involved in the AgroTrade segment of MAHA 2016 in four areas as follows:

#### **Agricultural bazaars**

Fresh produce such as fruits and vegetables, plants, orchids, flowers, seedlings and plant cuttings were sold at many stalls set up near Gate 1 and Gate 2 entrances. Here visitors could buy grafted fruit trees.



The Green Tunnel at the entrance to the Garden District for Vegetables



Ornamental pumpkin “Upin & Ipin V74”



Drama at the Agricultural Bazaars





At the Food Empire

### Food Empire

Inside this hall, 62 food entrepreneurs had set up stalls selling 168 popular specialty dishes from each of the 13 states of Malaysia. The food entrepreneurs were selected from cooking competitions held during various mini-MAHA events at state level between 2015 to 2016. I saw a stall promoting the “Mushroom Burger” developed by MARDI as a healthy food.

### Marketing transformation seminars at the Conference Hall

A series of seminars were conducted in Malay on business opportunities in the agriculture sector. The fees ranged from FOC to RM100. Topics included:

- Successful agropreneurship via internet marketing and social media
- Success stories of young agropreneurs such as Adeq Sue Resources in manufacture of fish paste and sauces; NQ Group Enterprise

in export of crisp fried onions (*bawang goreng*) to Japan; Zee Industries in *keropok lekor* renamed as Malaysian Fish Fingers for export; Berlina Agribiz in fertigation method of planting chili and rock melon

- Export of durian to China
- Financing for Agropreneurs
- Export and international trade: start-up, sales, marketing, bidding for export orders, financial management, distribution channel, pricing and marketing access strategy, exporting via Alibaba.com

### Castle of Fruits

The “Castle of Fruits” was an attractively designed pavilion, strategically located near to Gate 1. Nobody could miss it. The products on show were attractively priced at between 5 to 20% below normal retail price. Visitors could buy many types of tropical fruits here such as rambutans, papaya, mangoes, ciku,

jackfruit, coconut, etc. There were live cooking demonstrations on stage, and occasionally a whiff of deep-fried chempedak.

The soursop (*Annona mauricata*) was picked as the “Fruit of MAHA 2016” due to its high nutritional values and recent significant successes in growing it. Soursop products were sold as fresh fruit or in paste, chips, juice, cordial, syrup and ice-blended form.

### State Pavilions

There is a special area for permanent State Pavilions in which each state of Malaysia has built a pavilion for the promotion of state products.

### In conclusion

MAHA 2016 was extremely popular. There were just too many people every day. Hopefully, MAHA 2018 will see improvements in logistics and in helping visitors to move around faster. Here are some suggestions:

- In March 2016, it was announced that MAHA 2016 would be held from 24 Nov to 4 Dec. Then in November, it was announced that MAHA would be held on 1-11 Dec. Hopefully, MAHA 2018 dates will be fixed early with no more changes after the official announcement.
- Traffic jams started a few kilometres before reaching the show ground and got worse during peak times



The Castle of Fruits



The Sarawak Pavilion



Inside the Sarawak Pavilion





The State Pavilions area

and weekends. The traffic congestion had a spill-over effect on other roads. Many cars were parked along road shoulders outside the showground. Can traffic control be improved further?

- The internal trams and buses were always full and the queues were very long. There were helpers at each stop for crowd control. If not for them, the situation would have been chaotic. Can the number of transporters be increased?
- More effort could have been made to encourage people to walk, but the guide map sold at RM 1.00 was of little help and the directional signs were inadequate.
- It was difficult to carry purchases to the car parks. There were announcements offering to help carry purchases to owners' cars, but the offer only applied to bulk/heavy purchases.



One unique mode of transportation at MAHA 2016 was a tram pulled by tractor

- December is rainy season. Can the organisers choose the drier holiday season for MAHA?
- There were long queues at the washroom facilities. It looks like the current quantity of 670 toilets is not enough.