

## **“Hopper Race” seminar a learning platform**

A brown planthopper and pest-themed agricultural science seminar was successfully held at Room A003 Heritage Hall, UTAR Perak Campus on 2 March 2014.

The seminar, entitled “Hopper Race” (sharing the name of TVE Japan’s latest documentary), was under the joint auspices of UTAR Centre for Biodiversity Research, Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) and TVE Japan. The seminar also saw the active participation of staff and students from UTAR Faculty of Science learning from seasoned agriculturists; namely, UTAR Chair of Agricultural Science Prof Dr Ooi Aun Chuan who is also the Organising Chairman, Executive Director of PAN AP Sarojeni V. Rengam and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia School of Environmental and Natural Resource Sciences Prof Dr Norela Sulaiman. Also present was the producer of the “Hopper Race” documentary Juka Kawaii from TVE Japan.

UTAR Centre for Biodiversity Research Chairperson Assoc Prof Dr Say Yee How welcomed everyone to UTAR Perak Campus and also to the seminar. This was followed by Prof Dr Ooi who started the ball rolling by presenting his findings entitled “Rice Planthopper Outbreaks and Contributing Factors and Biodiversity-based Ecological Agricultural Solutions” which gave the audience a better understanding of the current view of the biology of the rice brown planthopper, the causes of outbreaks, the diversity of natural predators and the ways to minimise outbreaks through education. According to Prof Dr Ooi, in Malaysia the research on these pests indicated that the use of insecticides actually does more harm than good as natural predators of the rice brown planthoppers are killed, thus promoting the growth of the planthoppers population. “The only way to prevent rice brown planthopper outbreaks is to help the farmers to understand the effectiveness of natural enemies. Regulations will not work if the farmers do not understand the role of biological control agents,” he elaborated.

Sarojeni’s presentation entitled “Impacts of Pesticides on Health and the Environment” also complemented Prof Dr Ooi’s earlier presentation on the unfavourable effects of insecticides. “There is a need for stronger regulation, awareness building and efforts to warn the users about the externalities associated with insecticides,” she concluded.

The last presentation entitled “System of Rice Intensification and Benefits” was by Prof Dr Norela who spoke on the studies conducted by UKM in rice intensification and the need to avoid insecticide for sustainable rice production.

“Hopper Race”, which was scripted, directed and edited by Juka was then played to the absorbed audience. The 60-minute documentary highlighted the threats posed by rice planthopper to rice production in Asia, where rice is the staple diet for most of its population which exceeds more than 4 billion.

The one-day seminar ended with Dean of Faculty of Science Assoc Prof Dr Lim Tuck Meng extending his thanks and appreciation to the organiser, the speakers and participants for ensuring the success of the “Hopper Race” seminar.



Prof Dr Ooi presenting his findings



Sarojeni talking on "Impacts of Pesticides on Health and the Environment"



Prof Dr Norela on her “System of Rice Intensification and Benefits” presentation



Dr Lim (fourth from right) together with the speakers and participants of the seminar