



PERA e-AGRI NEWSLETTER

FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE - UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

SERVICE EXCELLENCE, LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, ADAPTABILITY AND INNOVATION

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FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE - UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2020 TO SEPTEMBER 2020

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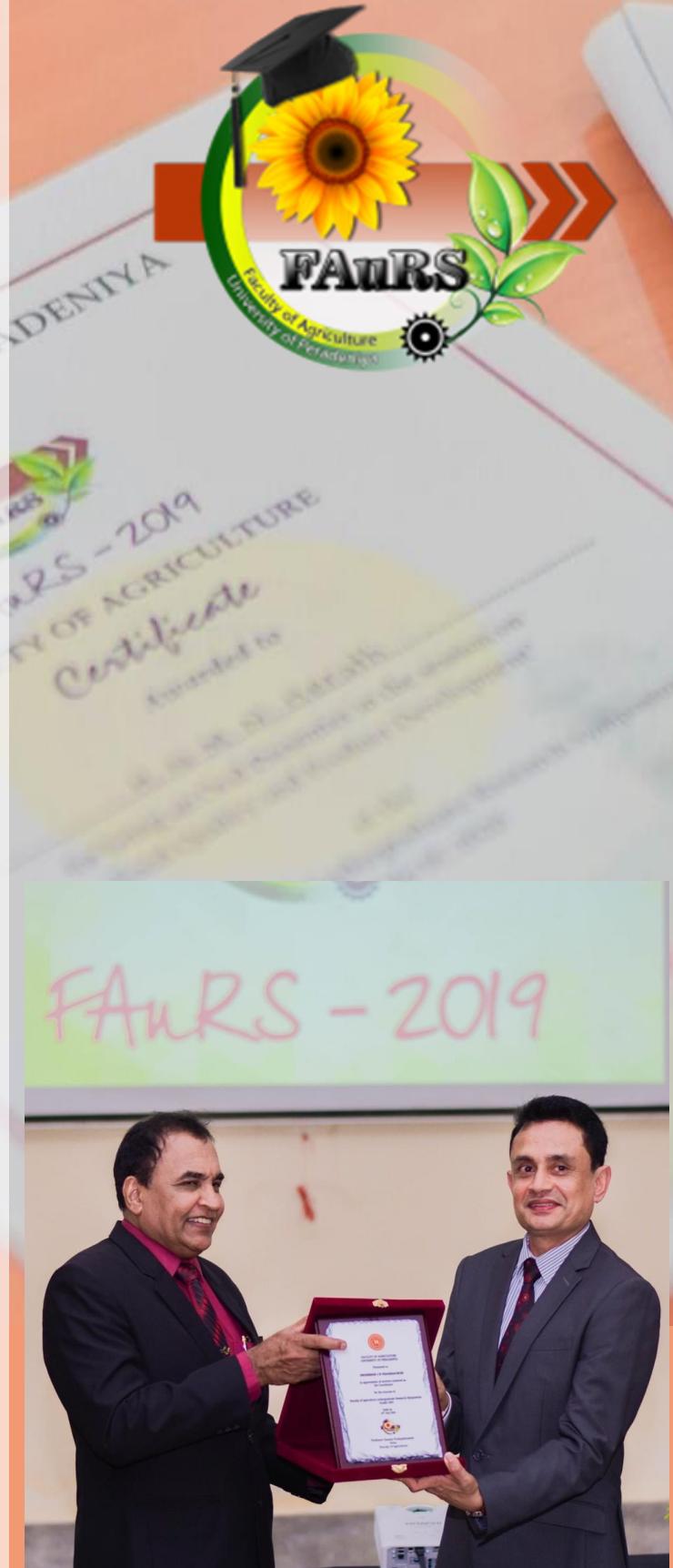
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The Faculty successfully staged 6th Undergraduate Research Symposium (FAuRS – 2019)

Faculty of Agriculture Undergraduate Research Symposium (FAuRS) – 2019, was successfully staged on 16th July 2020 for the sixth consecutive year at the Theatre, Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya with over 150 participants on-ground. Prof. Upul B. Dissanayake, the Vice Chancellor of University of Peradeniya graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The event was live-streamed (<https://www.facebook.com/perabeatsinsights/videos/713293915905988/>) facilitating many participants joining online. The symposium was conducted adhering to all the guidelines issued by the government of Sri Lanka and the UGC in controlling Covid-19 pandemic.

FAuRS is an annual event organized by the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya, to provide an opportunity for the graduands of the three degree programmes offered by the Faculty, namely the B.Sc. in Agricultural Technology and Management, B.Sc. in Food Science and Technology, and B.Sc. in Animal Science and Fisheries, to present the findings of their final year research projects. The proceedings of the FAuRS-2019 showcase the findings of 212 research projects in the form of abstracts. A total of 54 presentations selected on merit basis from 212 graduands of 2019 were presented at the technical sessions on oral (27) and poster (27) presentations. All the presentations were organized under four themes, i.e. Agricultural Production & Productivity, Technological Interventions & Applications in Agriculture, Food Quality & Product Development and Community & Environment, depicting key thematic areas of the curricular of the three degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Agriculture.

FAuRS also provides an opportunity for the graduands to showcase their talents in writing, photography, videography, and oral presentations in communicating science for the scientific community as well as the general public. At FAuRS-2019, the best oral and best poster presentations under four thematic areas, best innovations and inventions, research briefs prepared in three languages (Sinhala, Tamil and English), videos prepared by students to disseminate knowledge derived from research projects, 'Scientific eye' research photography based on students' projects, and 3 minutes thesis presentation (3MT) with one



Technical Competitions

Oral Presentation - Winners

Overall Best	: Edirisinghe S.A. (AG/14/FT/004)
Session I	: Senevirathne S.M.P. (AG/14/054)
Session II	: Edirisinghe S.A. (AG/14/FT/004)
Session III	: Herath H.N.M.N. (AG/14/FT/024)
Session IV	: Welewanni W.W.M.S.M. (AG/14/205)

Poster Presentation - Winners

Session I	: Kodithuwakku V.N. (AG/14/217)
Session II	: Chandrasekara E.D.C.T. (AG/14/ASF/023)
Session III	: Karunadhipathi U.L. (AG/14/ASF/032)
Session IV	: Hettiarachchi M.H.S.M. (AG/14/110)

Non-Technical Competitions

Three-minute Thesis Presentation - 3MT

Winner	: Rathnayaka R.M.M.P. (AG/14/049)
1st Runner-up	: Prabashwari T.I.G. (AG/14/ASF/040)
2nd Runner-up	: Chandrasekara E.D.C.T. (AG/14/ASF/023)

Research Briefs

English	: Amarawansha R.M.K.P. (AG/14/ASF/02)
Sinhala	: Ranasinghe R.D.U.A. (AG/14/234)
Tamil	: Ganasegaram K. (AG/14/102)

"Scientific-Eye" Photography

Winner	: Fernando S.R.T. (AG/14/014)
1st Runner-up	: Wanniarachchi W.A.K.T.M. (AG/14/FT/042)
2nd Runner-up	: Rathnapala P.G.P.K. (AG/14/236)

Research Video

Winner	: Samarasinghe S.A.I.L.N. (AG/14/220)
1st Runner-up	: Karunadhipathi U.L. (AG/14/ASF/032)
2nd Runner-up	: Chandrasekara E.D.C.T. (AG/14/ASF/023)

Inventions & Innovations

Winner	: Ishara W.A.K.S. (AG/14/FT/054)
1st Runner-up	: Karunadhipathi U.L. (AG/14/ASF/032)

slide were assessed and awarded. Faculty of Agriculture of University of Peradeniya is the first Faculty in Sri Lanka to conduct an undergraduate 3MT® competition with the approval of University of Queensland, Australia, the institute holding copyright of 3MT®. The Sri Lanka Invention Commission (SLIC) evaluated and awarded the best Invention & Innovation projects. The cash prize of Rs. 100,000 for the overall best presenter in technical session on oral presentations was awarded by Sarvodaya Sustainable Economic Enterprise Development Services Limited (Sarvodaya SEEDS).

Prof. J.K. Vidanarachchi of Department of Animal Science coordinated FAuRS-2019 with the guidance of Prof. D.K.N.G.

Pushpakumara, the Dean of the Faculty, and with support from the organizing committee represented by academic staff, non-academic staff and students. We congratulate Prof. Vidanarachchi and his team for the successful closure of FAuRS-2019 and all the winners of different competitions on their achievements.



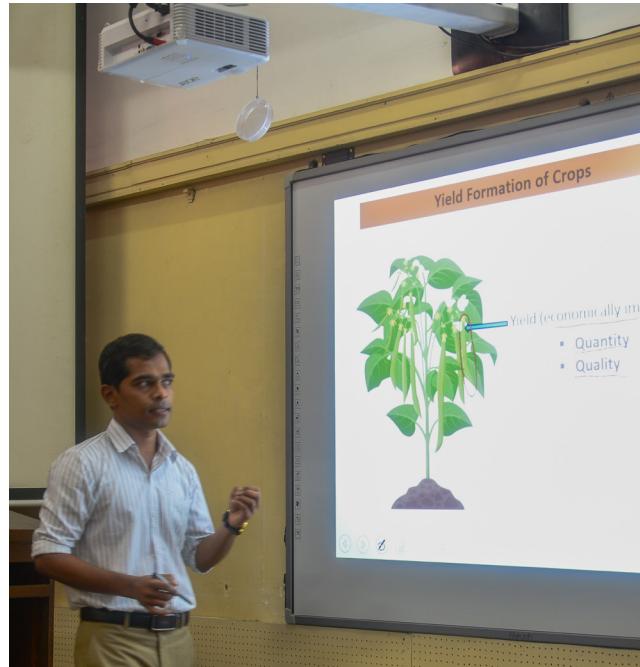
Rising to the challenges of COVID-19: Adopting the academic programme of the Faculty to the “New Normal”



Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya is continuing the academic programme and related activities amidst the hard time created with COVID-19 pandemic. An interview was conducted with Prof. D.K.N.G Pushpakumara, the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture to get an insight into how the Faculty is operating under this difficult time.

Q – Although students are not on ground, both academic and non-academic staff members are reporting to work regularly. What are the precautionary methods that have been established in the faculty to ensure their safety?

A – During the first wave of COVID 19 we formed a “COVID-19 Response Committee” including all categories of staff and students. The committee developed operational guidelines with support from the experts and monitor implementation of safety measures. The Faculty acquired necessary items such as pedal-operated washbasins, footbath mats, temperature sensors, sanitizers, etc. Since there are number of entry points to the Faculty, we divided the Faculty premises at Peradeniya into six clusters for easy management. When entering to the Faculty grounds, security officers help with disinfecting activities and body-temperature monitoring. Currently, we have advised the staff members who are coming from high-risk areas to work from home.



Q – Is the academic program at Mahallupallama Sub-campus continuing?

A – Yes, indeed. The academic programme offered in Mahallupallama is continuing. Being a somewhat isolated location, Mahallupallama Sub-campus gives an advantage to control the spreading of disease by restricting movements. All precautionary measures against COVID-19 are being practiced there to ensure the safety of students and staff. A random PCR check was done with the support of health authorities and found negative. Field visits and community engagement activities have been temporarily postponed but students are continuing with lectures and practical conducted at the Sub-campus premises. We have requested from parents to not to visit the students. The welfare of students is being strictly monitored by the Lecturer In-Charge, Warden and staff.

Q – What are the Challenges faced by the Faculty in continuing academic program online?

A – Situation created with COVID-19 is a new experience for us. We have been already using online teaching and learning platforms through Agri e-Hub to support blended learning activities in the Faculty, although not to its fullest capacity. After deciding to continue the academic programme through online platforms we have considered the issues from both delivery and receiving ends. We provided trainings for the academic staff to develop content for online teaching and made arrangements to provide necessary resources under given circumstances. We conducted surveys with



students achieving 100% participation to identify the challenges they faced. At present, in large group classes where there are about 200-300 students, the participation in online classes remains at about 60 -70%. While in small classes, participation is about 80 - 90%. Some students struggle with internet connections, lack of devices, excessive data cost and lack of good learning environment. We are aware of these shortcomings and taking actions to ensure equal delivery of content to all the students by different strategies. We are having continuous dialogue with students. Student Advisory and Welfare Committee (SAWC) of the faculty and the Alumni Associations of the University of Peradeniya and Faculty of Agriculture are supporting to ensure student welfare as well and providing of devices such as tabs. We need the support of the government and service providers to provide students with good internet access at a low cost under the current circumstance to continue with online delivery mode.

Q – Since Agriculture is not completely a theoretical subject, what are the plans implemented for delivering practical knowledge?

A – Practical knowledge is important to develop skills and attitudes. By the time students graduate it is essential for them to have necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to support their careers as stated in their graduate profiles. We value every single day of a student since the time that is lost cannot be taken back. Therefore, we are using the present time to improve knowledge using online platforms. We plan to continue the practical programme after meeting the students face to face. With the support from Timetable Committee of the Faculty, the time allocation for different teaching and learning methods have been carefully mapped. If this situation prevails for more than half a year we will have to look for meaningful and innovative alternatives.

Q – Other than continuing with lectures what are the other events that faculty could hold successfully during COVID-19 crisis period?

A – When answering this question, first I wish to appreciate the behaviour and commitment of our students. Many students' societies were active throughout this difficult time. They organized a number of events through online platforms. If I mention a few of

them, the Buddhist brotherhood Society arranged a "Dhamma" discussion and "Prabudhdha", the Faculty Art circle organized "Nada Denuwara" and "Gee Mathaka" musical programmes. Other than those, we were able to successfully staged the Faculty of Agriculture Undergraduates Research Symposium (FAuRS) with the commitment of the students and the staff. All these activities helped the students to release the stress and stay connected. No one like to be locked down in a place. It is very important to be connected with each other during this difficult period.

Not only the students, there were many programmes arranged by the staff too. We conducted an orientation program for our temporary staff and several out-reach programmes were conducted by the Agribusiness Centre, Agriculture Biotechnology Centre and Agriculture Education Unit successfully. Alumni Association of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya also conducted the webinar on "Blooming with Post COVID-19 Challenges in Agriculture and Food Industry" to improve the preparedness of agriculture graduates.

Q – Recently popular mass media announced that UGC is considering to conduct University exams through online mode. Is it going to be implemented?

A – Examinations are one of the ways of evaluating student's performances. At the moment Faculty uses a variety of methods in the evaluation process. If we consider the end semester examinations, we wish to conduct it in Faculty premises. However, we may have to consider alternative strategies, if the present situation prevails and directives come to conduct the assessments online. These decisions must be undertaken after a thorough discussion at the Faculty and the University levels. Problems and issues with the connectivity of internet and availability of internet access devices for all students are yet to be addressed before entering into such a decision.

The Dean also emphasized the importance of staying connected via proper communication during these difficult times and requested from all the students to direct their concerns, if there is any, to the office of the Dean, SAWC or to their Advisors.

Ms. Dinithi Ariyaratne (AG/15/120) and Mr. Pruthivi Tharaka (AG/15/039) from the Agriculture Faculty Journalism and Media Society conducted the interview with the guidance of Dr. U.I. Dissanayke from Department of Agricultural Extension and Dr. W.S. Dandeniya from Department of Soil Science.

1100 Series continuing uninterrupted in interrupted times

The new batch of undergraduate students admitted to the B.Sc. Agricultural Technology and Management (Ag.Tech.&Mgt.) degree program started their academic program in the first academic semester in their first year (1100 series) at Mahailuppallama (MI) Sub-campus on 7th September 2020. The academic program is offered following all the guidelines recommended to avoid COVID-19. The new entrants to the B.Sc. degree programmes in Animal Science & Fisheries (ASF) and Food Science & Technology (FST), completed their supplementary courses and leadership training at Mahailuppallama Sub-campus. Currently, they are continuing the academic programme with online teaching and learning activities.



Faculty of Agriculture in the Forefront of 2019 Fall Armyworm Crisis Mitigation and Research

In early 2019, Fall Armyworm (FAW; *Spodoptera frugiperda*) was first encountered in Sri Lankan corn fields. The polyphagous feeding behavior of FAW with more than 80 hosts, and the ability to migrate rapidly, made them infamous as an invasive species that threatened the agriculture and food security of countries in all corners of the globe. In the crisis of 2019, the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya, took a pioneer role in strategizing to conquer FAW from the very onset of its damage to corn fields in Sri Lanka. A team comprising of Prof. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara (Dean, Faculty of Agriculture), Prof. B. Marambe (Senior Professor, Department of Crop Science), Prof. D.M. De Costa (Chair Professor, Department of Agricultural Biology) and Prof. K.S. Hemachandra (Professor in Entomology, Department of Agricultural Biology) served in the Special Task Force appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture to tackle the FAW outbreak in Sri Lanka. Prof. Hemachandra also contributed with his expertise on Entomology by serving in several Department of Agriculture appointed committees. Further, nineteen undergraduate students following advance

The Canadian Entomologist (2020), page 1 of 10
doi:10.4039/tce.2020.52



ARTICLE

Development of a single nucleotide polymorphism-based DNA marker for fall armyworm (*Lepidoptera: Noctuidae*) biotyping: a case study from the fall armyworm outbreak in Sri Lanka

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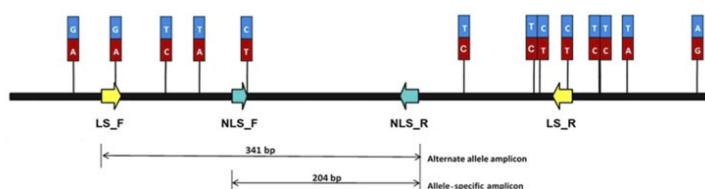
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programme modules in the Department of Agricultural Biology joined the FAW scouting programme covering farming areas in Kothmale together with the Mahaweli Authority and the Department of Agriculture officials making a marked contribution as future agriculturalists. In research front, under a special research grant given by then the Ministry of Mahaweli, Agriculture, Irrigation & Rural Development Sri Lanka, Dr. K.P.S.S. Kodithuwakku (Senior Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Biology), Dr. D.V. Jayatilake (Senior Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Biology) and Ms. N.H.L.D.L.D. Nanayakkara (Research Assistant, Department of Agricultural Biology) conducted research on the use of molecular tools

for the identification of FAW biotypes. The study reported the first molecular identification of both corn and rice FAW biotypes in Sri Lanka using DNA barcoding and the development of a diagnostic molecular marker ABUOP0002 for the detection of FAW biotypes using a low-cost gel-based approach. The research findings were presented as a poster at the Peradeniya University International Research Sessions (iPURSE) May 2019 and as a peer reviewed research paper in the journal, Canadian Entomologist in August 2020.

Research Article Link :
<https://doi.org/10.4039/tce.2020.52>

A



ABUOP0001: A novel molecular marker to track resistance to bacterial blight in rice

Bacterial blight (BB) caused by *Xanthomonas oryzae* pv. *oryzae*, is a major biotic stress affecting rice cultivations globally. Out of the 45 Xa genes known to convey resistance to BB, Xa21 is considered as a major gene delivering stable resistance. Growing rice varieties that are genetically able to resist against BB is the best strategy to overcome this devastating disease. Until now most plant breeders used the linked marker pTA248, mapped 225 kbp upstream of the Xa21 gene for marker-assisted selection (MAS). However, the latest advancements in genome technology have made it possible to design intragenic markers targeting causal genes itself than relying on linked markers. This leads to a much accurate selection, with less linkage drag. In the current research, targeting a 19-bp deletion in the ectodomain of the Xa21 gene, a new molecular marker ABUOP0001 was developed to detect the resistance allele of the Xa21 gene in rice. Absence of the said 19-bp region within the Xa21 gene was found to be associated with susceptible plant responses. The marker ABUOP0001 is introduced as a diagnostic marker compatible with high throughput screening platforms such as multiplex-PCR and high resolution melting. This enables mass screening for resistance to BB in rice breeding trials, making MAS time and cost-effective. Out of 42 newly improved and traditional Sri Lankan rice accessions, four newly improved varieties (At 354, Bg 250, Bg 251 and Ld 371) were identified as carrying the resistance allele at Xa21. These varieties could be used in breeding programs as donors of the Xa21 resistance allele. Overall based on its



Research Article

A novel intragenic marker targeting the ectodomain of bacterial blight-resistance gene Xa21 for marker-assisted selection in rice

Dhanesha Nanayakkara , Iresha Edirisingha, Lakshika Dissanayake, Deepika Weerasinghe, Lalith Suriyagoda, Venura Herath , Chandrika Perera & Dimanthi Jayatilake ... show less

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performance in the current study, the new marker ABUOP001 can be recommended as an important tool for MAS of Xa21 resistance allele in rice breeding programs globally. The research was funded by the University of Peradeniya research grants URG/2016/91/Ag and URG/2017/05/Ag and the research work was carried out at the Functional Genomics Laboratory of the Department of Agricultural Biology and the Regional Rice Research and Development Institute, Bombuwala.

Research Article Link :

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15427528.2020.1771643>

Enhancing Student Participation in National Agriculture Development: An exposure to the present status and future development of the Agriculture sector in Sri Lanka

The Agriculture Education Unit (AEU) of the Faculty of Agriculture has initiated a series of discussion sessions on the present status and future of the agriculture sector in Sri Lanka. The main objective of the activity is to create awareness among the final year students on future development plans and employment opportunities available in each sub sector of agriculture. The first discussion of the series was held on 28th September 2020 with the participation of Dr. W.M.W. Weerakoon, the Director General of Agriculture. Dr. Weerakoon highlighted the future development plans in the agriculture sector, especially the food and fodder crops, and the need of involving final year undergraduates in research and development programmes focusing on such plans.

A large number of final year students and academia participated at the event. Prof. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara, the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture delivered the welcome address and Dr. M. Ariyaratne, the Head/



Department of Crop Science moderated the Q/A session. The Alumni Association of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya (AAFAUP) and the Student Union of the Faculty of Agriculture joined with AEU as partners in organizing the discussion series while Prof. B. Marambe of the Department of Crop Science and Prof. J.K. Vidanarachchi of the Department of Animal Science (Director/AEU) served as the joint-coordinators.

“Blooming with Post COVID-19 Challenges in Agriculture and Food Industry” : Webinar by the Alumni Association of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya (AAFAUP)

The Alumni Association of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya (AAFAUP) organized the webinar "Blooming with Post COVID-19 Challenges in Agriculture and Food Industry" on 9th July 2020 to create awareness and prepare the agriculture graduates to face COVID-19 pandemic related issues in agriculture and food industry. The session was conducted using the online teleconferencing facilities available at the Board Room of the Faculty of Agriculture at University of Peradeniya.

The panelists were Dr. W.M.W. Weerakoon, the Director General of the Department of Agriculture, Mr. S. Warusavithana, the President of Organization of Professional Associations (OPA), and Mr. S. Liyanage, the Head of Research and Development (Food and Beverages) of the Unilever-Sri Lanka. Prof. B. Marambe served as the moderator for the webinar. The webinar was live streamed through Facebook and is available in the YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5Rx4LoBO7U&t=52s>).

Dr. K.M. Mohotti, President/AAFAUP delivered the welcome address while Prof. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara, Dean of Faculty of Agriculture presented the introductory remarks. Prof. G.L.L.P Silva managed the questions/comments posted by the participants. Dr. S.M.C. Himali, Secretary/AAFAUP coordinated the activity. The webinar was held successfully with the participation of undergraduates and alumni of the Faculty, academia, researchers and representatives from private sector companies, and many other stakeholders.



Capacity Building of the Staff

Workshop on e-delivery and content development for online teaching

The e-Learning and Computer Unit Management Committee of Faculty of Agriculture conducted four workshops to get the academic staff members to familiarize with different tools for e-delivery and content development facilitating online teaching and learning activities from 27th to 31st July 2020. The four workshops were titled (1) Basic functions and introduction to the Agri e-Hub, (2) Intermediate tools on Agri e-Hub, (3) Conducting Zoom sessions to support your e-delivery and (4) Content development for asynchronous e-delivery using your own computer/laptop. Dr. K.P.S.S. Kodituwakku from Department of Animal Science, Dr. U.I. Dissanayake from Department of Agricultural Extension and Dr. S.A. Weerasooriya from Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management served as the resource persons. Dr. Weerasooriya coordinated the workshops.

Orientation programme for the newly recruited Temporary Academic staff

The Teaching Methods Unit of the Faculty conducted an orientation programme for the Temporary staff members of the Faculty on 29th August and 5th September, 2020 to support their career transformation to fit in the role of University academics. Sessions related to history and the administrative structure of the Faculty, ethical conduct in the workplace, assisting in on-ground and online teaching and assessments, anti-rag act and by-laws, rights and responsibilities of the employees, and career development were some of the topics addressed during the programme. Profs. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara, E.R.N. Gunawardena, D.C. Bandara, B. Marambe, G.L.L.P. Silva, H.L.J. Weerahewa, D.A.N. Dharmasena, W.M.T. Madhujith and R.M.C.P. Rajapaksha and Drs. H.M.G.S.B. Hitinayake and C. Jayawardena and Mr. S. Rajapaksha, the Acting Registrar of University of Peradeniya, served as the resource persons.



**Do we need ethical clearance for our research works?
- A seminar for the academics**

The Ethical Clearance Committee of the Faculty of Agriculture organized a seminar on "Do we need ethical clearance for our research works and how to get it" on 15th September 2020 at the Board Room of the Faculty. More than 40 academic staff members of the Faculty participated at the event. Prof. I. B. Gawarammana, Chairperson/Ethical Review Committee of Faculty of Medicine served as the resource person. Prof. M.I.M. Mowjood of Department of Agricultural Engineering and Dr. N.U. Jayawardana of Department of Agricultural Biology coordinated the event.



Video on “Safe Laboratory Practices”

Ms. Y.M.U.K. Yapa Silva, Senior Staff Technical Officer of the Department of Agricultural Biology made a video on “Safe Laboratory Practices” using the knowledge gained through the training program on “Competency development programme for technical officers” held in Malaysia. The video has been uploaded in the Faculty website and available at https://agri.pdn.ac.lk/lab_practices.

Awards and Achievements

Annual Research Excellence Award: The Faculty recognized the academic excellence in research



The Annual Research Excellence Awards of Faculty of Agriculture recognizes excellence in research, innovation and research dissemination by the academic staff members of the Faculty of Agriculture. The awards are offered under three categories as Category I - Probationary lecturers/ Lecturers; Category II – Senior Lecturers; and Category III – Professors.

Annual Research Excellence Award 2018 was awarded at the FAuRS-2019 held on 16th July 2020. Dr. D.M.S.B. Dissanayake of the Department of Crop Science received the award under Category I and Dr. K.W.L.K. Weerasinghe of Department of Crop Science and Dr. P.C.G. Bandaranayake of the Agricultural Biotechnology Centre received the award under Category II. We congratulate the three award recipients on their achievement.



Dr. D.M.S.B. Dissanayaka

Dr. D.M.S.B. Dissanayaka joined the academic staff at the Faculty in 2012 and currently serving as a Senior Lecturer attached to the Department of Crop Science. His main research interest is on agronomy of field crops with the special emphasis on plant nutritional physiology. Dr. Dissanayaka obtained his Ph.D. from Hiroshima University, Japan. He has published original research articles and review papers in reputed journals such as Plant and Soil, Plant Cell and Environment, Journal of Experimental Botany, Journal of Crop Improvement, and Experimental Agriculture. He is a recipient of President's Award for Scientific Publication in 2015 and the National Research Council Merit Award for Scientific Research in 2017. Currently, his research programme focus on improving nutrient use efficiency of crops grown under stress environments such as nutrient-deficiencies and drought.

NEWSLETTER

FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE - UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA



Dr. K.W.L.K. Weerasinghe

Dr. K.W.L.K. Weerasinghe joined the academic staff of the faculty in 2006 and presently serving as a Senior Lecturer attached to the Department of Crop Science. He completed his M.Phil. degree at the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya in the field of Crop Science in 2008 and obtained his Ph.D. in the area of Eco-physiology in 2015 from Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. A major focus of his research is to quantify the impact of environmental gradients on plant physiological processes, particularly leaf respiration and impact of variations in leaf respiration on rates of net carbon uptake in a range of contrasting ecosystems over wider spatial and temporal scales combining laboratory and field experiments.

He has published results of the experiments in a number of world leading journals including, Tree Physiology, Journal of Experimental Botany, Plant Cell and Environment, New Phytologist, Global Change Biology, PNAS and Ecology Letters. In recognition of his research publications, Dr. Weerasinghe was awarded "Sri Lanka President's Awards for the "highly rated scientific publications" for the years 2013 - 2016 and the "Journal of Tree Physiology Award for the Best Graduate Student Research Paper" in 2014.

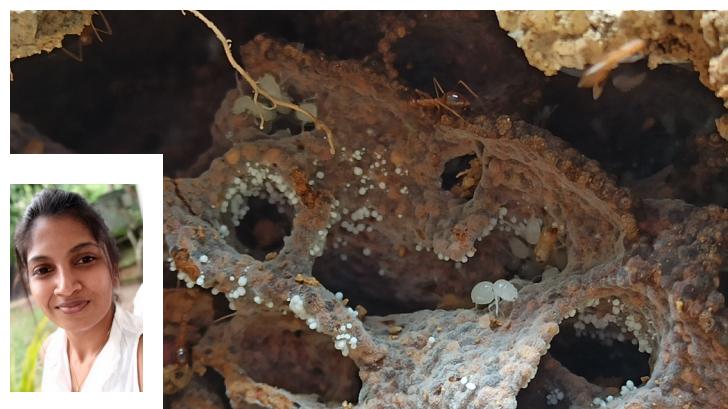


Dr. P.C.G. Bandaranayake

Dr. P.C.G. Bandaranayake is currently serving as the Director of Agricultural Biotechnology Centre, and a Senior Lecturer attached to the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya. She has four postgraduate degrees; Ph.D. from the University of California Davis with Designated Emphasis in Biotechnology, M.Sc. in Horticulture and Agronomy from the University of California Davis and a M.Sc. in Biotechnology and an M.Phil. Degree in Crop Science from the University of Peradeniya. During her graduate studies at University of California Davis, she secured several prestigious fellowships and awards offered to outstanding students and researchers including, University of California- Davis Plant Science Graduate Student Researcher Fellowship, Monsanto Scholarship, John and Terry Kubota Scholarship for Plant Sciences for two consecutive years, UC Davis Graduate Fellowship, Jastro-Shields Research Award for three consecutive years, Margosa Foundation Fellowship and IAPB Fellowship. Dr. Bandaranayake is continuing collaborative projects with UC Davis and several other leading universities in the USA. Currently, Dr. Bandaranayake conducts her research in molecular biology, biochemistry and genomics, leading several foreign and locally funded projects, on Cinnamon, Sandalwood, Wild and Cultivated Rice, Cuscuta, Loranthus and Tomato. She has co-authored many publications in prestigious journals including, Plant Cell, Plant Physiology, BMC Plant Methods, Molecular Biology and Evolution, Planta, Pest Management Science and Nature Scientific Reports. She has also co-authored seven book chapters. Dr. Bandaranayake serves as an editorial board member of several journals. She won the Presidential Awards for Scientific Publications for year 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2015 and the NRC Merit Award for 2011. She has recently secured several other prestigious fellowships and awards including the Cochran Fellowship from the US Department of Agriculture, Endeavour Research Fellowship from the Australian Government, the Early Career Fellowship from the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World, and the SL-CARP National Awards for Excellence in Agriculture Research 2019.

Akshara Samarasuriya: A fourth year student of the faculty won the FAO international photo contest

Ms. Akshara S. Samarasuriya (AG/15/119) won the first place (category mega and macro fauna) at the photo and video contest on Soil Biodiversity organized in parallel to the "Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity" by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Over 700 photos from 60 countries had entered the competition. Five best photos have been shortlisted and posted on FAO's main social media page for two weeks for public voting to select the first place. Ms. Samarasuriya's photo titled "Secret colony of termites under the soil" received 3000+ votes, winning the competition by over 1000 votes from the runner-up.



Outreach activities

Seed production during the COVID-19 crisis at Dodangolla Experimental Station: Contribution made to meet the national seed and Planting material requirement



Based on the recommendations of the Presidential Task Force on Agriculture, 15 crops have been prioritized for cultivation during the COVID-19 crisis period. Considering a request made by the Government of Sri Lanka to promote local seed production, Dodangolla Experimental Station of Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya with the collaboration of Department of Agriculture produced planting materials for Cowpea and Chilli. The first batch of seeds produced under this program was officially handed over to Mrs. Jayantha Ilankoon, Additional Director General (Development), Department of Agriculture by Prof. Upul B. Dissanayake the Vice-Chancellor of University of Peradeniya on 14th August 2020.

Prof. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture; Dr. M. Ariyaratne, Head, Department of Crop Science; Prof. B. Marambe, the Activity Coordinator; Dr. K.W.L. K. Weerasinghe, the Lecturer-in-charge of University Experimental Station, Dodangolla; staff members of the Department of Crop Science; officials from the Department of Agriculture; Mr. N. Amarasiri, the Farm Manager; and the farm staff took part in the event.

"Productivity enhancement through addressing emerging challenges": A workshop for the Executive Staff of Hayleys Plantations Pvt. Ltd

Department of Crop Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya conducted a workshop on "Productivity enhancement through addressing emerging challenges" to the Executive Staff of Hayleys Plantations Pvt. Ltd. on 11th September, 2020 at the Faculty premises. About 135 officers attended the workshop. Prof. S.P. Nissanka and Prof. B. Marambe from the Department of Crop Science and Prof. R.S. Dharmakeerthi from Department of Soil Science served as the resource persons. The topics covered at the programme included the need of providing optimum growing conditions for crops, climate change impact on crop production and recent trends, possible adaptation and mitigation measure with special emphasis to plantation sector, integrated weed management approaches and sustainability of the plantation industry, the importance of plant nutrients and need of proper fertilizer management for plantation sector followed by a laboratory demonstration to provide exposure on advanced technologies used in



soil and plant analysis. The Dean of the Faculty, Prof. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara made the opening remarks. Prof. S.P. Nissanka and Mr. A. Gamage coordinated the program.

SPSS and SAS training for the officers of the Department of Export Agriculture

Fifteen Assistant Directors from the Department of Export Agriculture attended a training program on "SPSS and SAS", the statistical software used in data analyses, organized by the Agriculture Education Unit of the Faculty of Agriculture in collaboration with the Department of Crop Science. The training programme was successfully held from 10th to 11th September 2020. Profs. S. Samita, T. Sivananthawerl and Dr. K.W.L.K. Weerasinghe from the Department of Crop Science served as the resource persons and Prof. Samita coordinated the programme.

Outreach activities of the Agribusiness Centre

The Agribusiness Centre has received a project on "Fabrication and installation of a double chamber pyrolysis unit for mass production of biochar from materials generated in coconut lands for research purposes". The project is funded by the Coconut Research Institute (CRI) of Sri Lanka. Dr. A.K. Karunatathna from the Department of Agricultural Engineering is leading the project.

The Agribusiness Centre conducted a one-day workshop on "Market Linking of Orchid Production" for the members of the Central Province Women's Chamber of Commerce on 8th September 2020. This is an activity of the supporting programme for the Agro-enterprise community in the area by the Agribusiness Centre. Prof. L.H.P. Gunaratne, the Director of the Agribusiness Centre coordinated the activity.



Appointments



Dr. A.K. Karunatathna has been appointed as a member of the "Committee of Experts to Develop a National Program of Solid Waste Management" by the Secretary to the President, with effect from 22nd July 2020.



Dr. C.K. Beneragama has been appointed as the Director of the Staff Development Centre, University of Peradeniya for a period of three (03) years with effect from 27th July 2020.



Dr. W.S. Dandeniya has been appointed as the Coordinator (part time) of the Counselling and Career Guidance Unit of the Faculty of Agriculture of University of Peradeniya for a period of three years with effect from 28th July 2020.

Faculty welcome new members



Dr. A.D. Igalavithana joined the Department of Soil Science as a Senior Lecturer (GR II) on 29th September 2020. Dr. Igalavithana completed her Ph.D. in Biological Environment at Kangwon National University, Republic of Korea. Her dissertation is titled "Biochar production, characterization and application for heavy metal immobilization and soil quality improvements".



Ms. R. Abeyrathne joined the Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management as a Lecturer (Probationary) on 21st September 2020.



Ms. A.M.Y.W. Alahakoon joined the Department of Agricultural Engineering as a Lecturer (Probationary) on 23rd September 2020.



Ms. E.M.G.P. Hemachandra joined the Department of Agricultural Engineering as a Lecturer (Probationary) on 23rd September 2020.



Ms. V.N.D. Bulathsinhala joined the Department of Agricultural Biology as a Lecturer (Probationary) on 28th September 2020.



Ms. P.G.A.S. Warnasooriya joined the Department of Agricultural Biology as a Lecturer (Probationary) on 28th September 2020.



Ms. D.M.M.R. Dissanayaka joined the Department of Soil Science as a Lecturer (Probationary) on 30th September 2020



Dr. W.E.M.I.J. Ekanayake has resumed duties at the Department of Animal Science on 25th August 2020 after the completion of his PhD in Animal Science at the Massey University, New Zealand. His dissertation was titled "Early weaning of twin-born lambs onto a herb-clover mix containing plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), chicory (*Cichorium intybus*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and white clover (*Trifolium repens*)".



Dr. D.N. Vidana Gamage has been promoted to the post of Senior Lecturer Grade II in the Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya with effect from 1st April 2019. Dr. Vidana Gamage completed his Ph.D. in Renewable Resources (Soil Science) from McGill University, Canada on 19th February, 2019. His dissertation was titled "New sensing technique to quantify spatio-temporal dynamics of soil water from point to field scale".



Dr. P. C. G. Bandaranayake of the Agricultural Biotechnology Centre has been promoted to the post of Professor in Molecular Biology and Biotechnology on merit with effect from 28th September 2018.



Dr. W.A.U. Vitharana has been promoted to the post of Professor in Soil Science in the Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, on merit with effect from 30th January 2019.



Dr. R.M. Fonseka has been promoted to the post of Professor in Crop Science in the Department of Crop Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, on merit with effect from 2nd April 2019.



Dr. R.S. Dharmakeerthi has been promoted to the post of Professor in Soil Fertility & Nutrient Management in the Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, on merit with effect from 7th May 2019.

Retirement

Dr. Heshan Wickramasuriya

Thank you for your years of hard work and dedication



After 40+ years of service to the Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Dr. Heshan Wickramasuriya has retired from the Faculty on 30th September 2020. Dr. Wickramasuriya contributed significantly in the disciplines of Agricultural Extension, Agricultural Education, and Information Management. During his tenure, he has held the positions of Head of the Department of Agricultural Extension, and Lecturer in charge at the Mahailluppallama Sub-campus of the Faculty of Agriculture, and Chairperson of the Board of Study in Agricultural Extension of the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya. Dr. Wickramasuriya has been an exemplary academic, who has committed selflessly to enrich the legacy of the University of Peradeniya. The Faculty very much appreciated his services to the students, colleagues and administration. We wish him a happy and healthy retirement life.

Building Connections with Music: A moral support from the Art circle of Faculty of Agriculture during COVID-19 crisis

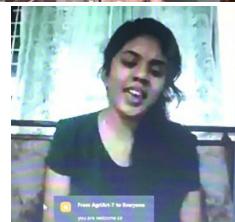
"Gee Mathaka":

An online musical programme "Gee Mathaka" was conducted on 5th July 2020 by the "Prabuddha" Art circle of Faculty of Agriculture selecting several songs written by Dr. Ajantha Ranasinghe. The event included songs and music where students performed from their homes via zoom. Art circle members coordinated and compered the event. Since the event was much appreciated by both students and staff of the Faculty a second online program on "Gee Mathaka" was organized on 26th July with the participation of Dr. Manoj Alawathukotuwa from the Faculty of Arts. These two musical programmes were praised as great stress relieving activities which provided entertainment and moral support to the students during COVID19 crisis period.



"Nada Denuwara"

The Agriculture Faculty "Prabuddha" Art Circle organized a joint musical program "Nada Denuwara" in collaboration with the Science Faculty Art Circle. The event which was held online via zoom on 17th August 2020 was attended by the students and staff of both Faculty of Agriculture and Faculty of Science. The event provided entertainment while strengthening inter-faculty students' collaborations.



**FOODTECH
Talks**

+ Post-pandemic food industry:
Challenges and opportunities.

Target Audience > Agriculture faculty undergraduates,
University of Peradeniya
(Passed out students are also welcome)

Session will be conducted by:

Mr. Tharindu Galage
CIOFood Technologist
Empire Food Solutions (Pvt) Ltd

On 20th June 2020
from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Through ZOOM

Registration will be closed
on 19th of June 6 p.m.

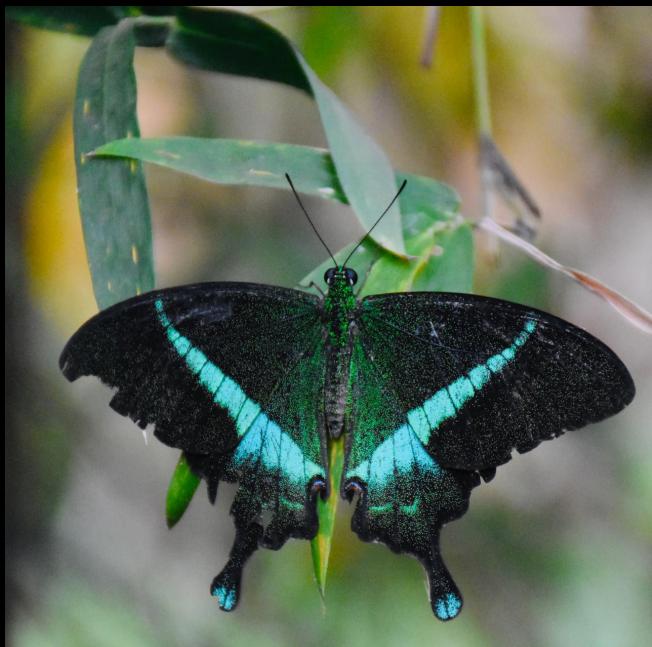
SOCIETY OF FOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

'Food Tech Talks' - a webinar series

Society of Food Science and Technology of Faculty of Agriculture has initiated a webinar series, 'Food Tech Talks' during the COVID-19 pandemic period targeting undergraduate students and general audience having interest in Food Science and Technology. Three webinars were conducted during June-July 2020 period by resource persons from food industry in which they shared the knowledge and experience with the audience. These sessions also provided the opportunity for students to actively interact and connect with the Alumni of the Faculty. The upcoming webinar notices are regularly updated in SFST Facebook page, which have 5300+ followers. In addition, articles related to food sector written by the members of the SFST are weekly posted in the SFST Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/societyoffoodscienceandtechnology/>) communicating updated knowledge in relation to food science and technology among a wider audience supporting knowledge dissemination.

University of Peradeniya becomes UniBioQuest Champs for the Second Consecutive Year

University BioQuest competition is the world's first mobile game designed for young zoologists, botanists and nature lovers. Participants steps into nature and help discover, learn and map the species that call those habitats home. The resulting biodiversity data is shared with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) for the purpose of scientific research and conservation. The UniBioQuest started between two universities (UC Santa Barbara and University of Sydney) in the year 2017 and expanded to a global competition as of now, participated by some of the most reputed Universities around the world competing for the championship. University of Peradeniya was represented by the student societies Biology Guild of the Faculty of Agriculture and the Zoological Association of University of Peradeniya (ZAUP) of the Faculty of Science in the years 2019 and 2020.



In 2019, in their first ever participation the UniBioQuest team of the University of Peradeniya won the overall championship becoming the team with the highest spotting and identification of biodiversity, representing Sri Lanka. The team of the University of Peradeniya excelled in their novice performance and set a record score in the UniBioQuest history under the leadership of the then Vice President of the Biology Guild Mr. Anushka Tennakoon (AG/14/247). This year the University of Peradeniya team led by the Vice President of the Biology Guild, Mr. Videesha Abeyasinghe (AG/16/003) secured the championship for the second consecutive year breaking their own record set in 2019. The team participated in the second round of the competition and out rightly dominated the competition by scoring five times higher than the winner of the first round - Team Sydney, and secured the overall championship in UniBioQuest 2020. The team was able to mark top places in six categories including Top spotter team, Top identifier team, Champion spotter award by Ms. Supipi Wijesundara of Faculty of Science, Champion identifier award by Mr. Heshan Liyanagedara of Faculty of Science, and the Top sighting of the competition by Mr. Uvin Tharisha (AG/17/ASF/012) of Faculty of Agriculture for his finding of an *Europis* spp.

The team received the guidance and constant encouragement to win the championship from Prof. D.K.N.G Pushpakumara (Dean/ Faculty of Agriculture), Dr. D.V. Jayatilake (Senior Treasurer/ Biology Guild), Dr. S. Kumburegama (Senior Treasurer/ ZAUP), and Dr. K.P.S.S. Kodithuwakku (Senior Lecturer/ Faculty of Agriculture). The team appreciates the contribution and support of Dr. K. Ukuwela (Senior Lecturer/ Rajarata University of Sri Lanka) and members of BioQuest 2019 team towards the victory.

We thank Ms. L. Weerasinghe (AG/15/184), the Junior Editor of Biology Guild for compiling this article. We congratulate the BioQuest team of University of Peradeniya on their achievement! Visit <https://questagame.com/storyposts/2020/9/19/the-2020-bio-quests-results> for results of the 2020 - Global University BioQuest.