



SEARCH



Dear Editor

Thank you for the copy of World Agriculture which I have been reading with interest – including the editorial, which resonated with my own thoughts.

One or two comments on the articles, which in places rather underlines your points, unintentionally I think.

I wish Vaclav Smil had gone on to say more about the uptake on Nitrogen Fertiliser in plants - why it is so inefficient and what might be done about it? Also, something about the actual carbon emissions involved in its production. Perhaps he could have a second innings?

I was a little puzzled by David Hughes' article. I thought one of the grounds for unease was that people do not ingest traces of individual pesticides but rather a cocktail of many traces. He does not seem to address this issue.

The article about wheat yields and feeding the world rings true in what it says about wheat yields. However, wheat is primarily a crop of the 'developed' world which is not where the outcome of attempts to 'feed the world' will be decided.

There does seem to be considerable evidence that yields starting from a much lower plateau can, in many cases, be substantially raised by improved organic

practices – without the issues of cost and indebtedness and unreliability of inputs often associated with the use of fertiliser and other inputs.

Christopher Jones, Agricultural Fellowship, Manor Farm, West Haddon, Northampton

Dear Editor

Tony Greer's paper "Planting Paradise – is there an option?" brought back many memories of Sabah East Malaysia, where I was from 1969 to 1979 and where I worked in forestry and conservation.

Throughout the 1960's and 70's forestry was the main revenue earner for the States' Treasury and forest reserves formed the greater part of the States land. Felling concessions were handed out with little regard for their future management and vast areas were felled. Managing a forest district, the largest role for myself and staff was to ensure the collection of the correct amount of royalty due and to fine those logging companies that left non-merchantable trees standing.

No seed trees of the valuable species were retained to restock the forest. As a forester, this was a concern to me, but may now be unfounded as timber is no longer the main source of revenue for the State. As a country develops and its road infrastructure increases and develops, new opportunities arise with the inevitable increase in population. Whatever one may feel about that, the first charge on land in any country, must be the provision of food for its people.

I note from Greer's map – Fig 2 – the considerable reduction to forest reserves, the expansion of areas available for agriculture and development and a welcome increase in the areas of land having protected status.

The potential for agriculture in Sabah was evident during the 1970's when the Padi Board, the Sabah Land Development Board and the Agriculture Department was improving agricultural techniques and introducing new crops.

I well remember collecting excellent tea from Kundasang, avocado pears and other fruit from Ranau. Temperate vegetables were grown at Bundu Tuhan – an all-year enterprise in the hinterland of Mt Kinabalu. Cocoa was introduced and coffee grown for village consumption. Tropical fruit was abundant, but not grown in commercial quantities.

There were also experimental fish ponds using tilapia – a species now found in our supermarkets and emanating from South East Asia. Rubber was tapped on old smallholding plantations, but demand was dropping.

Oil palm was the crop shown to have the best economic return and was being introduced. From an ecological

point of view, the plantations were sterile dark and dank, an environment enjoyed by rats who ate the fallen fruit and by snakes that ate the rats. I agree with Greer, that large oil palm plantations which cut off areas of forest from other areas, must

have green corridors provided so as to allow fauna to travel between areas of forest to breed and seek food.

Sadly some small animals will not cross roadways and tunnels may have to be provided. Not difficult when roads are being built as culverts could be placed in suitable places. Co operation between developers and ecologists would solve that problem.

I worked for most of my time in Sabah with the National Park service and the increase in protected areas is to be applauded.

I am particularly pleased that many of the areas that I recommended for protection under the Parks law have been so gazetted. Conservation areas must be respected and kept sacrosanct not only for obvious botanical and zoological purposes but especially in mountainous and steep regions to facilitate the regular supply of clear, clean water.

This is necessary for the increasing population and for the country's padi fields. Rice will not flourish in silt laden water. There is one other important reason for the protection of the Bornean forest. Plants provide the basis for many drugs and will continue to do so in the future.

Lose the forest and lose the potential for discovering new life enhancing medicines. Hopefully, the exploitation of the crude oil reserves discovered in the South China Sea in the 70's will provide sufficient revenue for Sabah's advancement without the need for any further exploitation of that wonderful treasure house that is the forests of Borneo.

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Reference: Tony Greer (2010) World Agriculture 1 (2) 18-22,
Planting Paradise – Is there an Option?

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Comments