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FAS Jakarta Launches "Biotech Ambassadors" Outreach

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Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals
Approved By:
Garrett McDonald
Prepared By:
Garrett McDonald

Report Highlights:
On October 24 and 25, FAS Jakarta organized two outreach events on the theme of *Advancing Biotechnology in Indonesia*. Post hosted a film screening and panel discussion of the Dutch documentary *Well Fed* for over 90 biotech students, members of the public, and nearly 500 online viewers. The following day 60 representatives from academia, government and industry attended a one-day seminar, which focused on biotech communication strategies. As part of the seminar, Post also identified nine influential advocates, representing the scientific, farming, and research communities to serve as "Biotech Ambassadors".

General Information:

Summary:

With funding from the State Department's Biotech Outreach Fund, FAS Jakarta and Post Econ Section organized events in Jakarta and Bogor on October 24 and 25 to advance understanding and acceptance of modern genetic engineering (GE) techniques in agriculture. Over two days of lectures, collaborative ideas sessions, and film screenings, a diverse group of stakeholders representing academia, government, and industry discussed the challenges facing the GE technology in agriculture while also laying out a path for continued engagement with policymakers and the public. Outreach on GE research and market access is crucial as Indonesia has yet to allow the commercial production of GE crops and has run overtly hostile media campaigns against foreign products like soybeans. Indonesia is one of the largest markets for U.S. GE crops, and American farmers exported nearly US$1.6 billion in GE products to Indonesia in 2017, including nearly US$1 billion of soybeans.

Background:

The Government of Indonesia (GOI) and local universities continue to research a number of GE crops, including tomato, rice, potato and sugar cane. The GOI's overarching policy on agricultural biotechnology is to use science along with the "precautionary approach" on issues surrounding environmental safety, food safety, and feed safety while also taking into consideration religion, ethical, socio-cultural, and esthetic norms. Despite the completion of Indonesia's GE crop risk assessment framework, approvals for GE products remain on hold due to a Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) regulation requiring the use of a "monitoring and control" system, which has yet to be developed. The complex approval process is compounded by MOA's open hostility to GE crops. In 2017**,** the MOA began a social media campaign that claimed that GE soybeans were less healthy, unsafe, and worse tasting than conventional domestic soybeans in an attempt to boost Indonesian producers as part of a government-wide food self-sufficiency campaign.

Ministry of Agriculture Infographic Claiming Conventional Soybeans are Tastier, Safer and Healthier than GE soy.

To counter these false narratives and build a consensus among stakeholders on how to further

acceptance of GE crops, Post launched a two-day event on *Advancing Biotechnology* in Indonesia, which focused on equipping key stakeholders in Indonesia's biotech community with new skills to better communicate their work to Indonesia's skeptical public. At the first event on October 24, Post hosted over 90 students from local universities (plus nearly 500 online participants) and members of the public at the Embassy's @america facility for a screening and panel discussion for the Dutch GE crop documentary *Well Fed*. The panel discussion, moderated and co-sponsored by CropLife Indonesia, featured two distinguished guest speakers: Dr. Mahaletchumy Arujanan, PhD from MABIC in Malaysia and Dr. Rhodora Romero-Ademita from ISAAA in the Philippines. The speakers answered audience questions on GE agriculture and encouraged the younger generation to remain engaged on these issues and to share their knowledge with other colleagues and peers that may have an opposing view. The following are links to the livestream video of the event:

Part 1: https://livestream.com/atamerica/main/videos/182407794

Part 2: https://livestream.com/atamerica/main/videos/182409179

A well-attended @america event focused on how biotech students can engage with their peers on biotech research.

On October 25, Post hosted a seminar in Bogor, home to many of Indonesia's leading GE researchers and academics. More than 60 representatives from academia, government and industry attended the one-day seminar, which focused on biotech communication strategies and offered participants a chance to share their thoughts on the challenges, priorities and potential for GE technology in Indonesia. As part of the seminar, Post identified nine influential persons, mostly from academia, to act as "Biotech Ambassadors". The role of the Ambassadors is to facilitate dialogue with the community at large as well as to advise the Embassy on and participate in GE outreach. Through the seminar's ideas session, Post received invaluable feedback on the types of future engagement that would be most effective. These included direct information sharing with key policy and regulatory staff, coordinated and clear social media engagement and greater youth outreach.

Indonesian Biotech Ambassadors will form the cornerstone of Post's local engagement on GE research and expanding market opportunities.

To capitalize on the momentum and positive feedback received following the seminar, Post is arranging a meeting at the Embassy with the Biotech Ambassadors to discuss activities for 2019, including a biotech roadshow with the Ambassadors and Embassy staff, targeted information exchanges with key policy and regulatory staff and further development of social media tools to counter anti-GE campaigns online. Post is thankful to State Department EB/TPN/AGP for their support and looks forward to continuing to leverage our Biotech Ambassadors to promote both science and market access in Southeast Asia's most populous nation.