



# Datuk Dr Choo Yuen May — 2014 Merdeka Award Recipient

Datuk Dr Choo Yuen May, the Director General of the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) recently made the oil palm industry and scientific fraternity proud by being honoured as the recipient of the 2014 Merdeka Award in the Health, Science & Technology Category. Datuk Dr Choo has raised the profile and prestige of Malaysian scientists by her tireless endeavour in leveraging Science and Technology for improving the competitiveness of the Malaysian Oil Palm Industry.

Datuk Choo is no stranger to awards and has been honoured with numerous international and national awards, including The Knight of the International Order of Merit of Inventors awarded by International Federation of Inventors Association (IFIA), Most Outstanding Malaysian Women Award in conjunction with the International Women's Day Celebration 2011, and the World Intellectual Property Organization Gold Medal for Best Women's Inventions 1994 and 2003.

The Merdeka Award is reflective of Datuk Dr. Choo's pioneering and transformative work in the field of palm biofuels, and novel, efficient and green processes for the palm-based industry through research and commercialisation of various technologies. Eleven biodiesel plants have been built to date, including one in Korea, one in Thailand and one in Colombia, South America based on her patented technologies. In addition to the biodiesel production technology, she has successfully commercialised R&D findings such as carotene-enriched red palm oil, palm carotenes and tocotrienol concentrates and palm-based degreaser.

Datuk Dr Choo has also added unprecedented value to the Malaysian oil palm industry by being at the forefront of issues related to sustainability. She has played a pivotal role in formulating and implementing a sustainability strategy for the oil palm industry that includes among others, reducing green house gas emissions from the oil palm industry. She has spearheaded research on the life cycle assessment of the production of palm oil and palm oil products and led MPOB in the formulation of the Standard for Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO). She continues to work on challenging issues such as carbon and water footprint, climate change, biodiversity, health and nutrition.

Besides her achievements in commercialisation, Datuk Dr Choo has made important contributions to basic scientific knowledge. She has spent about 32 years of research on Chemistry and Technology of palm oil. The results of her research findings have culminated in 826 publications in refereed journals/book chapters, conference proceedings, conference papers and technical reports and 60 patents (29 granted, 31 pending).

Added to that, notably, she has made significant contribution to advancement of Chemistry and Technology as well as the resource-based industry in particular the oil palm industry in Malaysia, expanding more palm oil uses, increasing more palm oil consumption and market share overseas; thus, bringing in more revenue and foreign exchange to the country.

As an academician, she has mentored and nurtured several scientists and successfully supervised 9 PhD and 5 M.Sc. candidates. In July this year the University of South Wales recognised her outstanding contribution to science by awarding her an Honorary Doctorate of Science. She has gained international recognition not only for herself but also for MPOB and the oil palm industry.



Furthermore, Datuk Choo is quick to acknowledge the role her mentors and former superiors have played in her success. “Their support and encouragement have been an important driving force for me and helped me climb the corporate ladder. I am also grateful to the current and former Ministers of Malaysian Plantation Industries and Commodities for all their support and guidance which allowed me to grow as a scientist and corporate leader “.

With the growing involvement of women in Science, Datuk Dr Choo is an inspiration and role model to women. Indeed, she has successfully dispelled the myth that science is for men. Hence, she hopes that her achievements will encourage other women to persevere in overcoming challenges in the male-dominated corporate realm and contribute to research and knowledge generation. She is motivated to share knowledge and take responsibility to help nurture women scientists and leaders. She has played a pivotal role in developing the next generation of researchers by mentoring younger scientists, especially women.

“Science transcends gender. It is all about pursuit of answers, aptitude, resourcefulness and motivation,” says Datuk Choo. She is also a strong believer in the importance of family and friends. “I would advise the younger generation to be fully committed to whatever they do without sacrificing family and friends. It is also important to keep in mind that failure is a stepping-stone to success. Fear of failure is the major impediment to success. Successful people fail and make mistakes but they don’t give up. You should analyse your failure and move on to success eventually by persevering”.



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