

POST EVENT REPORT



9th StarchWorld ASIA

11 - 13 Feb 2020 / Bangkok, Thailand

The **9th Starch World Asia** was held under challenging circumstances between February 11 to 13 in Bangkok, Thailand. A great turnout by committed delegates in the face of difficult travel conditions reaffirmed this as the leading venue for the starch industry to meet in Asia. This was an opportunity to understand in-depth the serious issues drought and disease present for the Asian starch industry while at the same time learning about the solutions that are emerging to these problems in the form of better, higher value added crop varieties. Of particular interest was:

- *A review of all the major factors currently impacting the industry including Covid-19, African swine fever, fall army worm and drought*
- *An in-depth review of the effect cassava mosaic disease is having on the crop in South East Asia including the discovery of disease resistance in some traditional varieties and the progress made in introducing a fully disease resistant cassava variety*
- *A full roundup of the state of the Thai cassava crop from the Thai industry and an early estimate of what the impact of drought might be on crop production*
- *An overview of the progress that has been made to introduce waxy cassava into the region and the potential this crop has for high end food starch production*

The conference began with an overview of difficult emerging issues that are affecting the industry, most of which relate to drought and disease. There is no doubt these supply side factors are serious, and the conference estimated what the initial impact of these developments will be on crop production. At the same time, while there will also be some short term impact on demand, particularly from Covid-19 and African swine fever, the conference established that demand for starch in the region is very robust and is likely to increasingly exhaust regional carbohydrate supplies. This presents several new opportunities for producers.

This made way for a detailed discussion of how far cassava mosaic disease, which emerged in 2015, has now spread across the South East Asian cassava crop. Extensive trials by CIAT and its partners have established that some of the highest productivity cassava clones in the region, including some new waxy varieties, are relatively resistant to the disease. A program to rapidly propagate clean planting material is underway, alongside another to introduce disease resistance into the crop with 2025 likely to be the year this program has a major impact.

A panel discussion was the format through which the Thai industry was able to take and answer questions regarding the state of the industry. Initial figures were released for the size of this year's drought affected crop, which led into a wide ranging discussion of development pathways for the industry. With the foundations firmly established, the conversation moved on to emerging product opportunities including growing demand for starch based biopolymers. This was followed by an update from one of the leading producers of their efforts to grow and process waxy cassava starch as a high value added solution to meet clean label demand. This presentation was paired with another from the industry body which has introduced the waxy variety into Thailand revealing the latest developments to raise both the yield and starch content of these varieties.

But new developments are also emerging in other crops as well. An Australian research institute shared its success in developing high amylose wheat for starch production, which may be a precursor for bioplastics production, as well as helping gut health. This and several other presentations opened up pathways for the development of fiber and other techniques to improve starch digestibility and produce more healthy foods within the industry.

Finally, a theme which ran throughout the conference was the increasing efficiency of production and several presentations gave insights into how proteins can be extracted from wastewater, as well as amino acids and fertilizers. The conference finished with a site visit to one of these production plants in Ayutthaya.

Simon has over 20 years of experience analysing and understanding commodity markets and in particular the starch industry. As a well-known industry consultant for much of his career he has advised multinational agribusinesses, energy and chemical companies on their raw material purchases, processing and operations as well as government bodies focused on reform of grain related markets.



As a Vice President of Olam International in Singapore, Mr Bentley led the research for a commodity fund and was actively involved in the day to day fundamentals of commodity trading. In 2015 he established Commodity in Singapore as a vehicle to provide advice to the international grain and starch industries.

Mr Bentley is a graduate of Trinity College, Oxford University and the London School of Economics.