

Better postharvest management can contribute to forest fire prevention in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the IRRC Postproduction Work Group (PPWG) has joined forces with the South Sumatra Assessment Institute of Agricultural Technology (BPTP Sumsel) and the South Sumatra Forest Fire Management Project (SSFFMP) to reduce postharvest losses, improve the quality of rice harvests, and increase farmers' income in the tidal and freshwater swamps of South Sumatra. In 2005, the PPWG provided several hermetic storage systems and a grain quality kit, including the IRRI low-cost moisture meter, to BPTP for testing, evaluation, and training purposes.

On 27-28 February, PPWG leader Martin Gummert and Eugene Aquino from IRRI's Agricultural Engineering Unit served as trainers in a collaborative training workshop organized by Ir. Budi Raharjo (BPTP) and Djoko Setijono (SSFFMP). The hands-on training was conducted in Palembang and Mulya Sari villages in Banyuasin District and covered

topics such as "understanding rice quality" and "improving farmers' seeds." The 35 participants were composed of staff from BPTP (5), the agricultural extension service (12), SSFFMP (5), NGOs (3), operators of rice milling units, and key farmers from the target villages. During the training, they learned how to evaluate quality traits using the IRRI assessment quality kit and to set up and operate hermetically sealed storage systems like the 50-kg super bag and the 5-ton hermetic cocoon for safe storage of seeds.

South Sumatra has around 500,000 ha of rice area, of which 30% are tidal swamps and 6% are freshwater swamps. Labor shortage during harvest in the sparsely populated areas leads to high losses and quality deterioration. Farmers often use fire for clearing land in the uplands. Mechanization of production and improved postharvest management can help solve these problems.

Dr. Karl Heinz Steinmann, team leader of the European



Participants practice setting up a hermetic storage system with 5-ton capacity. (Photo by M. Gummert)



Eugene Aquino of IRRI and Budi Raharjo (BPTP) show farmers in Mulya Sari village how to set up the super bags. (Photo by M. Gummert)



Participants measure paddy quality characteristics at BPTP in Palembang using the IRRI quality kit. (Photo by M. Gummert)

Union (EU)-funded SSFFMP, and Dr. Subowo Gitosuwondo, director of BPTP, explained that one objective of the collaboration is to increase farmers' income (through value adding) to reduce the need for burning bush land and forests. Increasing the productivity of rice production and postharvest operations in the lowlands will also reduce the pressure to extend rice production to the uplands and thus the need to use fire for clearing land. Thirteen priority villages out of the 200 supported villages in South Sumatra therefore received advice on rice production issues and postharvest management. As a follow-up, SSFFMP ordered 1,000 super bags from a local manufacturer in Jakarta for further evaluation in the priority villages.

Martin Gummert (m.gummert@cgiar.org)