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Andi Suwignyo, General Manager of PT Socfin Indonesia: Producing Seeds Requires Integrity and Integrated Research

by Editors · September 30, 2014 · 3.4K views · 5 minute read

The economic crisis in 1998, had put PT Socfin Indonesia down as a producer of palm seeds. The company's oil palm seed production fell drastically to 2 million sprouts from the previous year amounting to 18 million sprouts. Slowly and surely, the company which is under the ownership of the Socfin Group, is rebuilding its reputation and image as the best source of seeds at the national and international levels.

As an oil palm plantation company, PT Socfindo is trying to increase its land area from the current 38 thousand hectares. However, the challenges faced are quite diverse, such as overlapping land and incomplete RTWPs in several regions. The following is an interview with Andi Suwignyo with the Indonesian Palm Oil Editor Team who visited the Socfindo office in Medan:



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Oil palm expansion:

Actually, PT Socfin Indonesia is interested in developing land for oil palm plantations in other areas. However, many challenges and obstacles have not been resolved, for example the Provincial Spatial Planning (RTWP) in several regions has not been completed. Another problem is that many land ownership statuses overlap. In fact, we have already surveyed Jambi, Lampung and Kalimantan but have not obtained land due to overlapping status and regulations.

Another obstacle is the different responses from the community to the entry of oil palm investment. Of course, some responded well but some were disrespectful.

Therefore, we are quite careful in adding land, especially when dealing with overlapping regulations.

This means that the government needs to complete the RTRWP immediately. So that investment gets legal certainty?

So, the government must be firm by starting regulations more quickly so that it can complete the RTRWP. Provinces like North Sumatra and Aceh still face this problem. In this case the government must work hard.

There is already a potential palm oil land for Socfindo to develop?

We are currently exploring the Kalimantan area. There is land with a potential of 30,000 hectares with various land ownership statuses. Later, a team will be sent to examine the status of the land before it is acquired.

The government asks palm oil players to implement sustainable palm cultivation. How does Socfindo contribute to helping palm oil companies?

Sustainable oil palm cultivation carried out by PT Socfindo, among others, is through Best Practical Management, implementing RSPO principles. In addition, through a breeding program to obtain seeds that are resistant to certain diseases such as oil palm seeds that are tolerant of ganoderma, the use of shorter plant material becomes 40 - 50 cm per year so that plant growth is not high fast, reduces the use of chemicals using empty bunches fruit bunches) as compost, so this leads to environmentally friendly oil palm cultivation.



In the future, what is the direction of Socfindo as an oil palm plantation company?

Our target is to become the best plantation company in the world. It must be admitted, we are a bit late compared to other oil palm plantation companies in terms of area expansion because PT Socfindo's current focus is more on the intensification method.

Until now Socfindo remains a reference for other palm oil plantation companies. This achievement is already very good, right sir?

We cannot say that Socfindo has done well, but what is clear is that several palm oil companies and educational institutions have conducted a comparative study to PT Socfindo to see firsthand the management of oil palm plantations. At the age of more than 100 years in managing oil palm plantations, of course there are many things that can be seen related to sustainability, productivity, efficiency and the progress of breeding that has been achieved, even some time ago PT Socfindo has released new varieties that are more tolerant of attacks from ganoderma. .

From the aspect of human resources, the quality of PT Socfindo's workers has been tested. How is the company trying to build on this?

In fact, here we are really taught to commit to work that has been built for a long time. The company applies disciplined and strict rules for employees. Reward and punishment are clear mechanisms. The point here is that if an employee makes a mistake, for example embezzling Rp.10,000 and Rp.10 million, the value is the same, that is, it is still wrong and the sanction will still be applied as long as it is accompanied by authentic evidence. In this case, the form of punishment can be in the form of reprimands, warnings, and if the mistake is classified as severe, the sanctions given can include demotion and termination of employment in accordance with the existing mechanisms.

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This firm discipline culture is what the company applies to all employees. For employees who are being



In addition, the culture in the company does not recognize certain group systems based on ethnicity and academics. This is done by combining all elements of employees from various ethnicities and educational backgrounds to advance the company.

Can you explain when Mr. Andi started his career at Socfindo?

I started my career at PT Socfindo from 1985 starting from the garden. I'm originally from Banyuwangi.

Has Socfindo ever experienced the worst times?

In 1998, when the economic recession occurred, democratic euphoria occurred everywhere, including in oil palm plantations. Due to the stability of the government and the security situation that has been disturbed, it has resulted in decreased worker productivity, many of which have lost FFB in the field due to uncontrolled looting. Likewise, sales of seeds have also decreased drastically. Before the production crisis, the seeds reached 18 million sprouts but after the crisis fell to 2 million sprouts. At that time, buyers fell drastically, whereas in the previous year, many buyers were on the waiting list.

In the end, many oil palm seeds were destroyed. The price of oil palm seeds has also dropped to Rp 1,000 per grain. Slowly conditions improved and had a positive impact on Socfindo. In line with the condition of stability and the economy which is getting better, in 2012 our production and sales of oil palm seeds reached 48 million seeds.

How can buyers trust the quality of Socfindo's palm seeds?

Producing seeds requires high integrity from producers because in oil palm investment, selecting superior seeds must be a priority. This seed is a long term investment. Therefore, don't make the wrong choice of oil palm seeds because these plants will be up to 25 years old and if you buy the seeds wrong, then the investment that has been invested in oil palm plantations will not be able to return again. Therefore, PT Socfindo, in order to get the trust of the buyers, always shows the facts and openly welcomes prospective seed buyers to see the condition of the garden and the productivity of the seeds produced by PT Socfindo.

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Apart from integrity, other support comes from research and development activities which are carried out in



Has Socfindo received the RSPO certificate?

PT Socfin Indonesia is committed to producing sustainable products. To realize this policy, PT Socfin Indonesia has been a member of the RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) since 2004 and all Oil Palm Plantation will be RSPO certified this year. RSPO certification is a certification for the production of sustainable palm oil (Sustainable Palm Oil). Other than RSPO sustainable palm oil production certifications are ISCC (International Sustainability and Carbon Certification), and ISPO (Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil).

Apart from RSPO certification, all plantations of PT Socfindo are currently ISO 9001: 2008 certified; ISO 14001: 2004 and OHSAS 18001: 2007.

Does Socfindo have a plan to enter the downstream palm oil sector, such as producing specialty fats and oleochemicals? What are the opportunities for the downstream palm oil industry in your view?

The opportunity for the downstream palm oil industry currently has a pretty good prospect. The opportunity to obtain margins from downstream is very wide open. However, to enter the downstream palm oil industry, until now PT Socfindo has not thought in that direction, because PT Socfindo still wants to concentrate on the issue of more efficient plantation management and the development of more intensive oil palm breeding to obtain varieties that are resistant to ganoderma. Ganoderma is the biggest disease of oil palm today and in the future, which must immediately find the right solution to overcome it. (Qayuum Amri)



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