

# MALAYSIA AND TAIWAN BD 2016

It was late April and so the time had come again to head off for the annual farm and inspection trip to Malaysia and Taiwan.

I did travel to Malaysia and Taiwan in 2015, but somehow the time did not permit me to write a report, even though it was a productive and quite an eventful trip. All the farms had developed well.

On Friday 16<sup>th</sup> I flew into Tawau, Borneo to visit the farms of the Gan family. We went straight to the farm that is on the flat land near the sea. They grow mostly corn and watermelons on this land. The soil had improved and developed very nicely and the plant expression was good, especially considering some of the wet conditions they face. They have used both 500 and 501 very effectively. We went up the mountain to the Villa farm to spend the night.

Next morning we did the farm inspection. Here they are growing ginger, turmeric, cocoa and have planted coffee. There are also several varieties of mixed tropical fruit for personal use, which are surrounded by the native jungle. The quite good beginning soil has developed well and the humus content is building, especially in the turmeric and ginger plots that are rotating with green manure. The plant expression was also quite pleasing, with the cocoa leaves 'floating' in the atmosphere. The cocoa drops a lot of leaf and this creates some practical issues for applying 500. No machinery can get into the hilly slopes to mulch the leaves, so they have to apply the 500 there while it is raining, so as to get the 500 to the soil. The soil here also shows good BD development and it is pleasing to see this progress.

We were to stay another night in Tawau but Gan asked to change the plan so as to visit their two new farms on the mainland. So we flew to Kuala Lumpur followed by a two hour drive to Raub, in Pahang, an area of Malaysia I had not visited before.

Sunday morning we visited the first new 35 acre Durian farm in Tras, near Raub. It is on flat land divided by a nice small river with clean water and a pasture area for a few cows. It has been neglected for 5 years and they have been working to bring it back into order, replanting trees, pruning and removing a parasitic orchid from the existing trees, as well as getting the 500 out. There is also a substantial planting of mangosteen as well. We discussed using pasture management and 500 to build humus for the orchard. Went on to the next Durian farm, 9 acres in Ruan which has a totally different hilly setting, with trees well maintained and fruiting. Gan and CK would like to apply 501 to the Durian trees and we discussed ways to do this a spray unit that combines a mixture of water pressure and air pressure in combination, to get the 501 high above the trees. It will be interesting to see the results on this farm. We headed to Cameron Highlands and the farm of Tien and his wife, Woon Sing, our two most important and knowledgeable farmers in Malaysia. They have been providing the initial training in Malaysia for a couple of years now and together we provide the follow up farm and advisory visits for those farmers who start practicing.

The following morning I did their farm inspection where a lot of work had been going on. All the rain shelters had been lifted to allow better light and airflow into them, much improving the growing conditions. Still, a lot of 501 is needed. The rehabilitator is still pulling up some new soil in certain areas and this is developing very nicely, with the soil overall showing good humus development. Even though it is undertaken, I would still like to see more green manuring in general though. The crops showed good health and expression and the flavour is very good as usual.

Next we went to Yaung's farm in nearby Bringchang, a very good farmer who started BD a couple of years ago. He has made a smaller, lighter version of the BD plough with excellent results on the soil structure, due to the 500 and roots being able to work together to a greater depth. As such the humus development is greater, indicated by the soil colour changes, plant expression, and the great tasting vegetables. Yaung shows a good understanding of our BD method and will be a good help to Tien and Woon Sing. We also found time to visit a young farmer new to BD, Vincent Chia. He has been organic and has applied his first 500 on a section of his farm with a new green manure crop. We gave him some direction and Yaung will help to mentor him.

Tuesday was the farm inspection of Andy Lim where he is growing vegetables that are mainly supplied to Tien. Andy has made quite good progress with green manure and 500 and his broccoli was very nice indeed. He still needs to concentrate on using 501 more effectively to improve the overall plant expression. Again good to see this progress.

There was meant to be another inspection at the farm of Wai Meng, but he was replacing all the rain shelters and had nothing to certify so I suggested he not go ahead and save the money.

We then went to another new BD farmer, Chia, an older farmer who currently has a 6 acre NASAA certified farm. He mainly grows brassicas on the farm that is over fertilised, pushed with water soluble organic fertiliser and pest infested. The beds were also covered in plastic to suppress weeds. After visiting Tien's farm he has started to convert an area to BD with green manure and 500 and had planted cabbage in the area, and with a new appreciation for the soil the plastic on the beds is not included. The improvement in the soil and plant health was remarkable and Chia is converting the whole farm to BD. He says he has been around long enough to know a good thing when he sees it and was appreciative to have found our BD method. I gave him some advice on weed management without using the plastic as this will be a new challenge for him, but he seems determined to succeed.

The following day Tien had organised a meeting of some of the practicing farmers in Malaysia and about 10 attended. I enjoy these meetings of the farmers who are practicing as the nature of the conversation is greatly practical, interspersed with deeper insights into BD, that are actually only brought about by the doing. Much information was shared and they are developing a very strong group of farmers. Young and others will be a good support for Tien and Woon Sing as this informal association evolves. The meeting lasted about 4 hours followed by lunch and the afternoon off.

Thursday we headed down to the lowlands near Ipoh and went to a banana, guava and custard apple farm of a retired Malay General, Alif. The soil is a very poor compacted mix of clay and sand with only a small area treated with 500 so far and only showing minimal result. The 500 just can't work with the compaction and the Malaysian BD plough has been ordered to start relieving the compaction and allow the air and roots in. Alif has also ordered the stirring machine as he is concerned about the quality of his and his staffs stirring. He seems dedicated to do well but it is going to be a lot of work. Tien will keep me informed.

Next we visited a new farm which Tien and Woon Sing have purchased. Another couple that have had a long interest in BD have purchased the adjoining land in Tuarang, Perak. Tung, or Bird as I know him has been around the whole time I have been going to Malaysia. He has been growing on a small scale using BD and improving some very poor soil, wanting to expand for all these years into real farming, with circumstance not permitting. Now finally he has the chance with new land next to Tien. There are beautiful wetlands between the two properties. The land was previously rubber plantations that have been cleared and the good quality sandy soil will be easy to convert with green manure and 500.

On the way to KL we called into the 5 acre durian and banana farm of a young farmer, Chong Mun. When Tien first visited the durian trees had been suffering severely from gummosis type of disease that had caused dieback on some trees and killed others, causing a loss in production. He started BD about 15 months ago and there have been 3 sprays of 500. The soil humus is developing and the soil structure has improved as the pasture species have evolved and the management of the pasture changed to better build the humus and structure. To his amazement the durian trees were back to flowering and holding fruit. The overall health of the trees has improved and the 'bleeding' has stopped. I was there too early for the durian but the bananas were fantastic (and I am told that the durian were very fine flavoured and very much sought after).

Friday was a day of travel as we headed for the farm of Shui Yun and Liling in Hualien, Taiwan. Shui Yun is the finest BD farmer in Asia and has the combination of the most practical farming skills and very deep understanding of the preparations and our method. He has become a very good friend, despite the communication gap.

Saturday we looked at the farm and some leased land that Shui Yun has. He is growing rice and sweet potato as main crops, with other vegetables as a side line. As expected all was looking good, amazing soil structure and the plant colour and expression was great, despite 6 months of rain and very little sunshine. It certainly shows the benefit of well-timed 501 applications in such situations. Help is hard to find in Taiwan and Shui Yun has had the BD plough and several other implements made to make his farming operation easier. This farm is a showpiece for our BD method, standing out like a beacon in an area with much organic and 'natural' (do nothing) farming. We had lunch at a café that Shui Yun has let a young lady start on his property, very nice.

It was only a short visit to Shui Yun's farm this time and Sunday we headed off. Instead of taking the train around the coast to Taipei as usual, this time Shui Yun drove us over the mountains in the middle of Taiwan to Taijong. It took about 5 hours and there was some snow and sleet as you went over the peak at 3,200 m. In Taijong we visited a 'quietly' famous pottery where the master, who died four years ago, was the only person to be able to blend an extremely dense clay and work with it. He also developed a special glaze that helps hold the heat and also stop the cooking gas fumes from entering the food. The son continues to run the business as the master potter. We said our goodbyes to Shui Yun as he headed back to the farm.

The next day I had breakfast with Tien and Woon Sing, before having to say goodbye, as she was staying in Taiwan longer. She is a very kind person. I flew back to KL with Tien, then to Melbourne overnight and finally the farm.

I have now had 6 trips to Malaysia and 3 to Taiwan. These trips started for the purpose of running seminars and to work with farmers who had started their BD journey and had got some results. Also to get some farmers to a level where the countries are independent, providing their own training and mentoring. This then led to the trips being of a dual purpose with some of the farmers being certified Demeter by the BDRI. With new bureaucratic requirements placed on the BDRI the certifications can no longer take place.

I also feel that the necessity for me to travel to Malaysia and Taiwan each year for BD education is no longer needed. Tien and Woon Sing have developed their biodynamic and farming knowledge in the last 6 years, and others like Yaung will help immensely in Malaysia. They have been providing the initial training in Malaysia for 3 years now and are at the head of around 20 dedicated BD farmers. Shui Yun and Liling are leading in Taiwan and now providing training and mentoring. Shui Yun's knowledge of BD farming is unsurpassed in Asia, and new farmers are starting in Taiwan.

Needless to say I have developed lifelong BD working relationships and friendships with the above four fine people and many others in Malaysia as well. I will continue to go to Malaysia and Taiwan if needed, but I think that reality insists that my working trips to these countries will no longer have to be each year.

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