

**OPENING ADDRESS BY CHAIRPERSON OF TFNET BOARD OF TRUSTEES, H.E. DATO' HASLINA ABDUL HAMID FOR THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TROPICAL FRUITS (2021), 28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2021**

**SALUTATIONS**

**ESTEEMED CO-ORGANIZERS**

**DISTINGUISHED GUESTS FROM TFNET MEMBER COUNTRIES**

**REPRESENTATIVES FROM FAO-UN**

**DISTINGUISHED RESOURCE PERSONS**

**PRESENTERS AND RESPECTED PARTICIPANTS**

It is a great honour for me deliver this welcome and opening address with all of you on this auspicious event. As the Chairperson of the International Tropical Fruits Network Board of Trustees, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to the International Symposium on Tropical Fruits (ISTF 2021).

Tropical fruits play a critical role in sustaining healthy diets and ensuring food security. Tropical fruits are rapidly becoming a valuable trade commodity, as they are seen as a viable alternative to traditional export crops, thus serving to contribute greatly to livelihoods as well. The theme of the Symposium '*Boosting Tropical Fruit Production, Consumption and Market to Enhance Healthy Diets and Improve Livelihoods*' aligns with the

significant contribution and potential of tropical fruits for income generation and food security.

In the last few years, production of tropical fruits has charted positive growth. Tropical fruit production is driven mainly by growing population, income and better judgment of modern-day consumers towards healthy diets. This has been especially evident with fruit commodities such as banana, and lately avocados. Banana has been a significant contributor to global food security in addition to trade expansion. FAO data in 2019 revealed that production of banana rose from a mere 69 million tonnes two decades ago, to a staggering 115 million tonnes in 2017 to 2019. Recent findings from a value chain analysis by FAO on avocados showed that a total of 730,000 hectares were dedicated for avocado production globally in 2019 with an average expansion of 7% per year since 2009. The recent OECD outlook for 2020 to 2029 reports four major tropical fruits namely, mango, pineapple, avocado and papaya experiencing significant average annual growth rates, simultaneously outperforming the growth of major export commodities such as cereals, livestock products and sugar amongst others. Though international trade for these major fruits remains smaller in comparison to banana, there exists significant opportunity for trade growth.

A 2019 report by FAO states that approximately 99% of production occurs in developing countries, with Asia leading the regional cohort with the highest production of 56%. 70% of tropical fruit growers are smallholders. Hence, tropical fruits play a vital role in boosting the incomes and improving the livelihoods of these producers.

Globalization has led to greater integration and connectivity, therefore improving the efficiency of modern supply chains. However greater 'cohesiveness' also renders these chains vulnerable when a single point failure occurs, compromising the chain's overall functionality. The recent OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2021 to 2030 has stated that the COVID-19 pandemic placed unprecedented stress on the agriculture sector. At the recent UN Food Systems Summit, agriculture stakeholders were encouraged to work together towards transforming the way the world produces, consumes, and thinks about food, therefore calling for an agri-food systems transformation. The tropical fruit supply chains were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the industry forced to adapt to shifting consumer preferences and evolving retail ecosystems to remain sustainable. Although the dynamic of consumer preferences and retail ecosystems provide greater opportunities for industry stakeholders to explore, these changes also pose challenges for lesser resource-endowed entities such as smallholder farmers. This means that,

while developed countries or producers are better equipped to deal with negative consequences, the least developed countries continue to lag behind. Countries and stakeholders in the tropical fruit industry must have access to a platform for sharing lessons learned in order to address these disparities.

For the past two decades, the International Tropical Fruits Network (TFNet) has been in the forefront of national, regional and international collaborations for tropical fruits development. Many of TFNet's activities such as knowledge sharing, collaborative projects, capacity building have been geared towards achieving collective outputs which can be translated into effective national and global policies for the tropical fruit sector. As its yearly flagship event, ISTF 2021 serves in bringing people of similar interests to discuss, respond and propel research and ideas into policies and actions for the benefit of the tropical fruit industry.

Malaysia through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries (MAFI) is delighted to host the International Tropical Fruits Network (TFNet) – the sole global network on tropical fruits, and Malaysia remains committed towards supporting the development of the tropical fruits industry. Malaysia believes that this symposium will open doors for stakeholders of the industry including researchers to identify issues of common interest,

latest innovations and evidence-based solutions towards charting holistic strategies for sustainability. TFNet aspire to ensure that the collective inputs from the Symposium are directed towards informing policies and creation of knowledge products that will be of advantage for industry players.

It is also worthy to highlight that the International Symposium on Tropical Fruits (2021) coincides with FAO-UN's International Year of Fruits and Vegetable (IYVF 2021), which was launched in December 2020. TFNet is an active member of the International Steering Committee for IYFV 2021 for raising awareness on the importance of tropical fruits.

This year, we are thankful to our esteemed co-organizers the African-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO), Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), Indian Institute of Horticulture Research-ICAR (IIHR-ICAR), Guangdong Academy of Agricultural Sciences (GDAAS), the Indonesian Tropical Fruits Institute (ITFRI) and CABI-South East Asia for supporting and partnering with TFNet in organizing the event. I also wish to acknowledge the role of Burleigh Dodds Science Publishing as the Media Partner for this event. The symposium would not have been successfully implemented if not for the hard work of the TFNet Secretariat.

I have to say that I am very much impressed with the degree of participation from all levels of the tropical fruit industry. Although initially, the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited the organizing of the physical event, on the contrary many participants from numerous nations and across borders have come together virtually to deliver their valuable knowledge.

I convey my heartiest congratulations to all participants and organizers for the efforts undertaken in making the Symposium a successful one. I am certain that the deliberations of this symposium will serve to benefit all, while creating new knowledge and foresight for the tropical fruit industry to align its outlook facing the future.

I hereby declare the Symposium open! Wishing you a fruitful Symposium.

**HE. Dato' Haslina Binti Abdul Hamid**  
**Chairperson TFNet Board of Trustees (BOT)**  
**Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries**  
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