HEAD OFFICE ADDRESS:
Zibeline International Publishing Sdn Bhd
C2-2-3, Block 2, CBD Perdana 3, Persiaran Cyberpoint Timur, Cyber 12, 63000 Cyberjaya, Selangor.
Tel: +603-86879842

EDITORIAL STAFF:

Publishing Manager
Tasbia Ab Rajul

Publishing Co-Coordinator
Nurul Atikah Arsat

Publishing Editor
Farah Awanis Md Radzi

Publishing Editor
Nurul Afiqah Ab Manan

Technical Editor
Nuruljannah Kamarudin

Technical Editor
Fakhruddin Che Fauzi

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www.fabm.org.my

E-mail:
info@zibelinepub.com
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Editorial

Food and agribusiness have a massive economic, social, and environmental footprint—the $5 trillion industry represents 10 percent of global consumer spending, 40 percent of employment, and 30 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions. Although sizable productivity improvements over the past 50 years have enabled an abundant food supply in many parts of the world, feeding the global population has reemerged as a critical issue. If current trends continue, by 2050, caloric demand will increase by 70 percent, and crop demand for human consumption and animal feed will increase by at least 100 percent. At the same time, more resource constraints will emerge: for example, 40 percent of water demand in 2030 is unlikely to be met. Already, more than 20 percent of arable land is degraded.1 Moreover, food and energy production are competing, as corn and sugar are increasingly important for both. Such resource scarcity could lead to political unrest on a large scale if left unaddressed. Agricultural technologies that raise productivity even in difficult conditions and the addition of land for cultivation in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and South America may ease the burden, but meeting the entire demand will require disruption of the current trend.
Food & Agribusiness Management (FABM)

Professor. Mirza Barjees Baig
King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Professor. Gy S. Straquadine
The Ohio State University, USA

Professor. Faisal Sultan Al-Subaiee
King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Professor. Serafin L Ngohayon
Ifugao State University, Philippines

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University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

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University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

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University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

Damian Felladam Tangonyire
Agriculture for Social Change Department
Regentropfen College of Applied Sciences-Kansoe
Bolgatanga Upper East Region Ghana

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Beni Suef University, Egypt.

Dr. Cosmas Parwada
Department of Natural Resources Management
Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences
Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Marondera, Zimbabwe

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Higher Agronomic Institute of Chott Mariem Sousse, University of Sousse, Tunisia.