

# Mahidol offers a study in green

It's the most eco-friendly university in Thailand, and can teach others a thing or two, writes **Apinya Wipatayotin**



**MU vice president Suwanna Ruangkanchanaset**

**D**ubbed the country's greenest campus, Mahidol University (MU) could easily serve as a model for nature-challenged Bangkok.

Visitors to the university in Bangkok's adjoining province of Nakhon Pathom will find "green" activities at every corner of the 1,200-rai compound.

From bicycle lanes, walking streets, a mini-wind power station, to organic vegetable farms, MU students and teachers never stop coming up with new projects to preserve its name as the eco-friendly university.

## CITY LIFE



MU kicked off its eco-university initiative in 2008 with the aim of becoming a role model for other universities and nearby communities in the protection of the environment.

"We started out by reducing our six-lane road for cars to only three lanes and turning the other three lanes into bicycle and walking lanes," said MU vice president Suwanna Ruangkanchanaset. "Then we thought that creating bicycle lanes only was not enough and that we also wanted to change our people's way of thinking and adopt energy-saving practices."

To Dr Suwanna, going green means not only increasing the green areas by growing trees, but also using clean technology to minimise the impact on the environment.

The university's management recently

earmarked 900 million baht to improve the campus environment by growing lots of trees and creating water sources, including canals and ponds inside the compound.

All of the 50,000 light bulbs in the university were replaced with energy-saving bulbs while 2,256 air-conditioners which had been in use for more than five years were decommissioned.

More than 400 bicycles are available free of charge for students and staff to travel within the campus to reduce the use of cars and motorcycles. Riding in the campus is an entertaining and relaxing activity as every bike lane is shaded by rows of large trees.

The free-bicycle project has proved to be very popular among students and staff who see it as a way of exercising and protecting the environment from air pollution at the same time.

For people who need to travel a little faster and more comfortably than by bicycle, MU has arranged 15 shuttle buses as a means of public transportation within the campus to cut down on the use of private cars.

The campus's organic farming project is another outstanding activity under the MU green initiative.

MU has allocated five rai to local villagers to grow chemical-free vegetables. The farm has become a source of cheap and toxin-free vegetables for the university staff. Among the best-selling vegetables are tomatoes, morning glory, bean sprouts, Chinese kale and pumpkin. They cost only 10 baht a pack.

Ramphueng, a vegetable grower who only gave her first name, said she is glad that the university allows her to farm at the site. Some professors taught her organic farming techniques. She has now stopped using farm chemicals which helps to cut down on farming costs while improving her health.

Another highlight of MU's green campus is a wind turbine which can produce 2 kilowatts of electricity an hour. The wind turbine is situated at the faculty of medical technology's building. A solar cell has also been installed on the rooftop of the science and technology building which can generate 19.65 megawatts of electricity.

"With clean power technology, the university can reduce greenhouse gas emissions to only 12 tonnes a year," said

Dr Suwanna.

The better and healthier environment at the university is proof of the success of MU's green initiative that other academic organisations and communities are being encouraged to follow.

But what made the MU students and staff even prouder was when the university was ranked 36th in the worldwide green university ranking conducted by the University of Indonesia in 2012. Number one belongs to the University of Connecticut in the United States.

A total of 215 universities were involved in the survey.

Other Thai universities ranked in the top 100 of the greenest universities are King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Thonburi (38th), Chulalongkorn University (41st), Kasetsart University (44th) and Mahasarakham University (71st).

The ranking was based on several criteria such as the infrastructure, energy management, waste management, water consumption and transportation systems.



LEFT

The university has allocated a five-rai plot to local villagers to grow chemical-free vegetables.



ABOVE

A traffic sign at Mahidol University warns motorists to watch out for cyclists. PHOTOS BY APICHART JINAKUL