

SIA Alumni Newsletter - Edition 3 - 15/03/2021

SIA Alumni NEWSLETTER

"Bringing together 25 years of alumni to build a food secure future for all"

In This Issue

**The New SIA Alumni
Executive Board &
Advisory Board**

**SIA Alumni Accolade 2020
Juan Pablo Mora Mora**

**Feature story:
James Thompson**

**SIA Alumni story:
Minhee Kim
Bianca Costa
Theresa Schnitker**

**SIA Alumni news:
5 M Euro for a new RTG
3MT competition
SIA Alumni Garden**

*Connect
with us*



**Justin
Whittle**
Chairperson

**Pramila
Thapa**
Finance

Eusun Han
Communications

Lydia Konlan
Engagement

**Mizanur
Rahman**
Partnerships

EXECUTIVE BOARD — SIA ALUMNI —

Happy New Year from the Executive Board

It has been a tough year for all of us - accepting the new normal, yet struggling to move forward. The pandemic has affected our health, career and relationship with people. Our thoughts are with all of our alumni in these unprecedented period.

Amid the pandemic, we have heard incredible stories from our inspiring alumni around the world giving us hope. At SIA Alumni we also had been working hard completing two milestones. We have elected an impressive Advisory Board and Executive Board.

Each one of us are formulating plans to strengthen our engagement, to share information and knowledge, and to make meaningful impact. We are very grateful for this opportunity to serve SIA alumni.

We hope in 2021 SIA alumni can function as a platform for all of us to interact, to be inspired and to encourage each other. We wish you a great year for 2021, stay healthy and safe wherever you are.

~ Eusun, Pramila, Lydia, Mizanur & Justin

AlumniK Alumni Göttingen



Joint MSc Georg-August-
Universität Göttingen
Kassel Universität
Agrarwissenschaft
EST. 2009

SIA Alumni Announcements

It may seem like it has been quite recently from SIA Alumni however we have been working harder than ever with major restructures and exciting new opportunities for our alumni for 2021.

Here are some announcements and updates for our alumni that you may have missed.



Register Today



**Congratulations
SIA Alumni
Accolade 2020
Juan Pablo
Mora**

SIA Alumni 2013
(Full article pp.5)

**Join 27 March Online
Accolade Ceremony.**

To Join we check our LinkedIn & Facebook to receive code.

**Newly Elected
Advisory and Executive Board.**

We are happy to have such great advisors who will help shape and give skilled workshops for our alumni. Likewise we are excited to work with talented
**Executive Board
(check pp.4)**

**Our application for a
SIA Alumni: 2021 DAAD
SDG 2 Summer School** in Goettingen was **rejected** for 2021.

However we will try again to develop a summer school on hunger

Adam von Trott
**AMBASSADORS
OF CHANGE**

INTERNATIONAL
ALUMNI PROGRAM
21-28 NOVEMBER 2021
GOETTINGEN

Alumni Goettingen has exciting program in 2021 is dedicated to the 16th SDG "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" from 21-28 Nov Applications are open from 1st Mar- 18 Apr 2021.

Click [here](#) to apply.

Every 2nd Month throughout 2021.

We have organised alumni skills workshop, alumni online forum and other events.

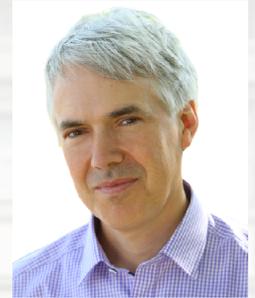
Make sure you keep your calendar ready.
Check your junk email.

SIA Coordinator Coordinator & Alumni Advisory Board

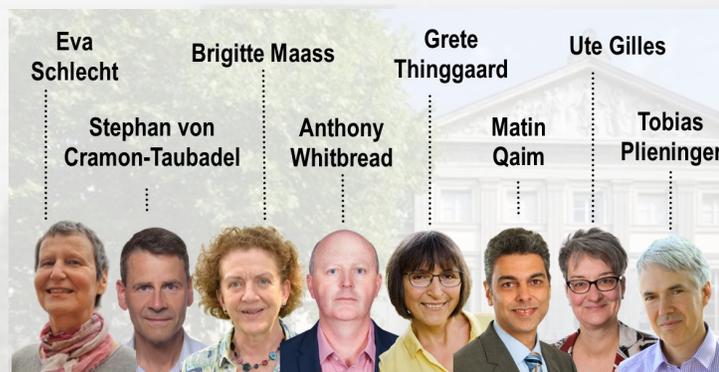
Dear alumni of the "Sustainable International Agriculture" programme,

Two challenging semesters are (almost) behind us. Without proper preparation, we were forced to completely switch into online courses. I'm not sure who is more to commiserate – the students or the teachers? How much do we all miss the face-to-face interactions in seminars, the field trips and exercises, joint coffees (or beers) before and after classes, life on campus and so on! On the other side, I'm impressed how much progress we all have made in taking up the opportunities of digital teaching. Though certainly no replacement for physical encounters, we find out that digital break out rooms, online projects, and the like can be fun and make in some ways our lives easier, for example for students with small kids. For the SIA students, however, the pandemic has come with particular hardships. Most SIA students have family abroad, job opportunities fell away, and a large part of the most recent student cohort was not even allowed to travel to Witzenhausen and Göttingen. Who would have thought one year ago that it would ever be possible to attend SIA courses online from a home in Nigeria or Chile? Like a magnifying lens, the covid19 pandemic lays open many of our societies' deficits, but also of their potential for development and innovation. I very much hope that, once the pandemic is overcome, we'll have learnt some lessons for dealing with the even larger challenges of the looming climate crisis for agriculture and society. In SIA we strive to equip you with the necessary knowledge and tools for analysing and managing our natural resources (and their relation to society) in times of increasing complexity and uncertainty.

Yours sincerely, **Prof. Tobias Plieninger**
SIA coordinator, SIA Alumni Advisory Board



"Who would have thought one year ago that it would ever be possible to attend SIA courses online from a home in Nigeria or Chile?"



ADVISORY BOARD
— SIA ALUMNI —

^ Above is our new Advisory Board for SIA Alumni. We are very honoured to have such a diverse and interdisciplinary board will help guide, inspire and shape alumni. Keep an eye out for our special Advisory Board skills workshops throughout the year exclusively for SIA Alumni.

Get to know your Executive Board



Justin Whittle (Alumni 2018)

Chairperson

Justin will bring strategic leadership and vision for how the network should progress with advice from the advisory board and executive board.

"I am passionate about connections, and love emerging markets, novels food system like cactus & bugs."



Lydia Konlan (Alumni 2016)

Engagement

Lydia will work on building activities and activating sustainable engagement with SIA Alumni, guided by the strategic plan of the SIA Alumni.

"Narrating untold rural stories is my passion and I like to explore innovations for rural development"



Pramilla Thapa (Alumni 2014)

Finances

Pramilla will be responsible for and in control of finances, accounts and budgets of the SIA Alumni.

"I am learning to lead. People and nature are my great sources of knowledge."



Mizanur Rahman (Alumni 2013)

Partnerships

Mizanur will bring strategic partnerships, internal and external collaborations that promote the SIA Alumni strategic plan.

"I am enthusiastic about agricultural regulatory and policy areas."



Eusun Han (Alumni 2009)

Communications

Eusun will organise the newsletters, email lists, meeting calls and designs correspondence on social media.

"I love story-telling, music, people and culture. I learned to network at SIA, and I am loving it."

Contact us: sia@alumni.goettingen.de

Congratulations SIA Alumni Accolade 2020



After SIA (2013-2015), Juan opened a farm for education and thousands of students were trained for Organic Agriculture. It was based on his strong conviction - people's awareness on healthy food and clean environment shape the agricultural systems.



Juan with his family



SIA Alumni Accolade 2020 awardee: Juan Pablo Mora

"For me it is clear, that nothing is going to change if people do not understand how agriculture affect their daily lives and the availability of basic goods like healthy food, clean air, and water."

My name is Juan Pablo Mora, agronomist, graduated from SIA program Organic Agriculture in 2015. I decided to study agronomy with the idea to improve small farmers livelihoods in Mexico, where most of them live in poverty. After my bachelor's degree, working with farmers I realized that only a few farmers succeed economically, but with a high environmental and social cost. Degraded soil, loss of biodiversity, contaminated food, and environment. In 2005 I started involving myself in organic agriculture, at this moment began my journey to change my conventional agriculture mindset where all is based using external inputs, like fertilizers and pesticides. Until now, I understand why soil health, biodiversity, and local consumption, are the basis to regenerate our food system. It has been a long and hard unlearning process where every day I learn and surprise myself of the possibilities that agriculture based on nature offers.

In 2017 I decided to start a mix farm model with educational purposes for Aguascalientes citizens. It was visited by thousands of school students. We also gave training related with urban agriculture. For me it is clear, that nothing is going to change if people do not understand how agriculture affect their daily lives and the availability of basic goods like healthy food, clean air, and water. Only when citizens understand and demand it, farmers will improve their practices.

Due to financial constraints, I ended farm activities two years later, however, my enthusiasm and activity promoting regenerative agriculture was not stopped. Now, I am working in Vitalis Organic Seeds, happy to work closely with organic farmers in Central Mexico.

Thanks to my wife to support this journey. Thanks to the University of Kassel, University of Göttingen and SIA program to help me to find answers. Thanks to SIA Alumni for this honor to receive this accolade. Thanks to my family, friends and teachers that have influenced me for what I am today:

Carmen Mora, Santiago Mora, Toño Esparza, Dario Mora, Santiago Mora Jr., Luis Mora, Mary Mora, Juan Carlos Mora, Mayela Mora, Adriana Mora, Edmundo Ramírez Flores, Carlos Urban Haübi, Chava López de Mendoza, Alejandro Lomas Torres, Jacobo Ruiz Velasco, Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez Macías, Mario López Gutiérrez, Carlos Arteaga, José Arteaga, Jorge Berni, Moni Delgadillo, Marisol Tenorio, Agustín Medina, Pablo Mora, Toño Vera Nuñez, Carlos Martínez Guerra, Elaine Ingham, Sofia Mora, Maria R. Finckh, Christian Bruns, Ricardo Romero González, Guillermo Garnica, Guillermo Mertes, Iris Weiland, Rubén Ibarra, Maricruz Sanzón, Susy García, Daniel Mora, Erica Renaud, Francisco García, Pacho Gangotena, Richard Perkins, Daniel Baertschi.

Feature Story: James Thompson

(SIA Alumni 2006)



**IOA (2006-2008)
graduate from
West Australia
Located in Saudi
Arabia
Consultant & project
manager**

***"We commit ourselves
to careers that
promote sustainable
agriculture yet find
that the opportunities
to really make a
difference are so often
compromised...."***



^2021 Al Ula Oasis, Saudi Arabia

Watching the shadow patterns cast by the date palm canopy in the ancient oasis of Al Ula my thoughts take me back to the palm groves of the Al Hajjar Mountains of Oman where, together with my fellow students from Witzenhausen and Goettingen, I received my introduction to the historic agricultural systems of the Arabian Peninsula. These remnant examples of traditional agriculture have prevailed at a time when modernity has fostered the degradation of so many unique agricultural landscapes and associated communities throughout the world. I sense that here in Al Ula, about 300 KM north of the city of Medina in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, our project to regenerate the wadi oasis, that has the UNESCO heritage site of Hegra as its centre piece, has been initiated just in time to preserve the oasis and the reservoir of genetic material that it supports.

The older farmers of Al Ula have been struggling to preserve their cultural life at a time when the younger generation has been lured away from the traditional oasis by the promise of greater economic prosperity derived from larger scale irrigated agriculture development projects in adjacent areas of the Governorate. Now, as the previously isolated Kingdom of Saudi Arabia opens to tourism, a new community vision that celebrates traditional culture and the monuments of past civilisations has led to a commitment by the Royal Commission for Al Ula to preserve and share this cultural landscape. This is the first time since my days as an IOA student in Witzenhausen, between 2006 to 2008, that I feel that I am working with colleagues who share an understanding of agriculture as an ecological system in a project mandated to regenerate a cultural landscape with agriculture as its foundation.

This rare opportunity to work as part of a like-minded group may be a familiar story to many of us who are linked together through the SIA Alumni network who have pursued careers outside the academic community and the European sphere of influence. We commit ourselves to careers that promote sustainable agriculture yet find that the opportunities to really make a difference are so often compromised by the economic rationale of conventional agricultural and the interests of organisations that sponsor agricultural development or business. So my current role in Saudi Arabia is certainly one that I have been looking forward to, although it is in a location that I least expected to find myself.

It was always a fascination to me as a youth in south-eastern Australia that the abundant natural world of forests and coastal heathlands was so productive without the intervention of humans when compared to the dairy farming lands that surrounded me. I felt concerned that the so-called formula of success for local farms involved the application of agricultural inputs that were considered so harmful – yet, as I was instructed, so necessary – that I had to wear protective clothing and breathing apparatus for the handling and application of these materials... *continued next page*

Feature Story: James Thompson

I often wondered what impact these substances were having on the agricultural environment, although these thoughts were largely set aside in the contentment of our rural lifestyle and the beauty of the natural environment that spread endlessly around us.

It was not until a few years later when I travelled to East Africa that I met farmers who seemed to have a completely natural understanding of the precious relationships between themselves, their farming activities and the environment. I was not to know that my time spent with traditional farming communities on Mount Kenya during the months of the coffee harvest would have a profound influence on the direction of my life and lead me to work in horticulture estate management for a period of 7 years during a time of great political and social change in Kenyan society. My work in Kenya enabled me to develop my horticultural production skills in a commercial agriculture environment and at the same time provided me with an opportunity to learn so much about traditional cultures and agricultural practices.

Following my return to Australia to work in the horticulture industry, I was searching for an organic agriculture consultant to contribute to one of my projects when I found that the University of Sydney was offering courses in ecological agriculture. Here I saw an opportunity to develop my knowledge and understanding of all that I had learned and observed during my work and travels in many parts of the world. This set me on a most rewarding academic sojourn of study and travel that eventually led me to Witzenhausen to undertake my M.Sc. IOA.

It was one of life's great privileges to be part of the Witzenhausen community – to be guided, challenged and encouraged in my personal growth, my thinking and awareness by such an inspiring group of academics and fellow students. My thesis research with Prof. Dr. Andreas Buerkert in the Department of Organic Crop Production and Agro-ecosystem Research in the Tropics and Sub-tropics (OPATS), involved a study of homegardens along the Nile River in Urban and Peri-urban Khartoum in Sudan. This experience, together with value chain and organic certification courses that I participated in at DITSL, set me on a pathway to a post-graduate career in consulting and project management. My work that has been mostly focussed on managing projects for the development of small-scale horticulture production systems and value chain development has taken me to interesting, and sometimes challenging, locations including Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Abu Dhabi and most recently here in Saudi Arabia.

When asked how I managed to find my way into these varied life experiences, I really am lost for a logical answer! However it has been a pathway of progressive enlightenment as one experience created the opportunity for the next. The sum of my experiences has greatly contributed to my sense of wellbeing and fulfilled my aim of playing a part in improving the livelihoods for agricultural communities and the sustainability of their farming systems.



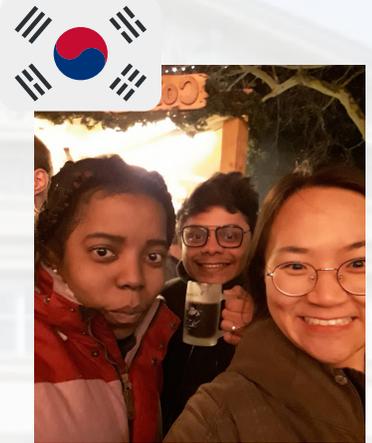
^2018 Onion crop evaluation in India

"It was one of life's great privileges to be part of the Witzenhausen community"

SIA Alumni Stories

A letter from **Minhee Kim** (Alumni 2018)

Hi there! I graduated in June 2020. After returning to Korea I have been working as a data analyst at the Catholic University. Before SIA, I had a tough college life in Korea. I worked part-time every single day to be able to afford my tuition fee - which was huge! It was so hard attending classes at the same time. The workload was high including the mandatory attendance to classes and I had to prepare for several exams and quizzes -unannounced sometimes. In Germany it felt so much better - single exam per semester and no requirement for attendance. Most importantly, I had a freedom to choose what I wanted to learn, not (only) to study for exams. Plus, it was joyful to spend free time visiting cities because of the low cost of the semester fee, including transportation fees. I happily studied, rested and enjoyed travelling. Also it was great to meet SIA people with very different cultural backgrounds, also to know we are so much alike to each other. Currently, I am looking for a PhD position. Yet I am not sure about "where". At the moment I work in data analysis on genetic diseases, and I will soon find out what I want to learn and research.



Minhee with friends at the Goettingen Christmas market

"(At SIA) I had a freedom to choose what I wanted to learn, not (only) to study for exams.."



Interview with **Bianca Costa** (Alumni 2015)

Bianca has been a Witzenhausen-enthusiast. ***"I was always the one making some ads on Whatsapp or Facebook groups to convince SIA students to live in Witzenhausen"*** said Bianca. While she was enjoying being a Witzenhäuser, Bianca found an opportunity for her master thesis project in Sweden (via Facebook!) and worked there on cow-calf systems for raising dairy calves. She emphasized that her previous jobs/activities in Witzenhausen helped her to survive and actively interact with the new research team.

After her completing M.Sc project, she decided to move to the U.S. for a Ph.D opportunity, and it wasn't an easy decision for a Witzenhausen- fan, said she, "I never thought about moving to the USA, and even if I got excited to be accepted in a great PhD program, the idea of leaving Witz, my friends, and my little projects at the community was quite painful."

Personally and financially Bianca had to face a tough transition from Witz to Minnesota. But she is settling down well with "Oskar" (her cat) in the new place, and sending a message for us. ***"It is not easy at all to leave our comfort zone, fear and anxiety can easily affect us, but we shall count on our faith, friends and family, not give up, and keep making the best of our lives with God`s permission."***



Bianca and her cat "Oskar" at the airport

SIA Alumni Stories

Reflections of **Theresa Schnitker** in Chile (Alumni 2018)

Hola chiquillos! During the SIA master, I decided to go for the double degree offered by the University of Talca. I gave my time in lockdown some thought and came to the conclusion that I actually made a ton of new experiences even though they might not be very instagramable. I learned some lessons along the way, which I would like to share with you. Let's start right at the beginning: I arrived in February last year, but my luggage took a week longer (lesson 1: always pack some spare clothes in your hand luggage!). I felt well prepared with my A2 Spanish and English, but as soon as I stepped out of the airport in Santiago, I was proved wrong (lesson 2: Chileans don't speak Spanish, they speak Chilean!). The semester started, it was summertime, my fellow students and I started exploring Talca and made plans for road tripping down south in the semester break. Long story short, life was good! Two weeks into the semester, the university switched to virtual classes, borders were closed, and basically everything else was shut down as well. Students moved from Talca back to their hometowns and our neighborhood was left deserted. Luckily, I had the most amazing Cost Rican roomies, and we made ourselves at home in our casa azul (look it up, according to google it's a nightclub with 5 stars!). Winter came and it got freezing cold and rainy (lesson 3: a toaster does the trick when it comes to warming hands in the morning). As soon as it got warmer, the three of us sat outside on the front porch whenever possible and enjoyed the sun (lesson 4: being together 24/7 in such uncertain times has its challenges but makes you grow so fond of each other!). Beginning of October, the pandemic slowed down, and the second semester came to an end. We were able to do a daytrip to the dunes of Putu, which felt like the biggest adventure after so many months in the casa azul. A week later we got the chance to hike in the Andes and were surprised with a hot tub next to our cabin after the hike (lesson 5: spent a night at Los Queñes River Lodge and Cabañas).



Therese with friends at the TALCA University on exchange

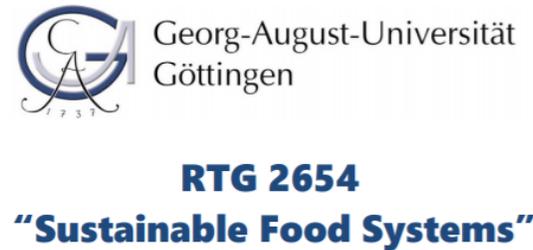
"I learned some lessons along the way, which I would like to share with you... lesson 6 visit Chile asap!"

SIA Alumni News

Congratulations! Advisory Board **Prof. Qaim** and **Prof. Plieninger** for new Research Training Group

DFG supports new Program at University of Göttingen with 5 million Euros The German Research Foundation (DFG) recently approved the new Research Training Group (RTG) "Sustainable Food Systems" at the University of Göttingen for funding. The first Program phase of four-and-a-half years will start in 2021 and will be funded with 5 million Euros. The overall goal of the new RTG is to combine excellent interdisciplinary research and graduate training related to the sustainability of food systems. Director of the new program is Prof. Dr. Martin Qaim from the Göttingen Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development".

Click [here](#) for more information.



RTG approved with 5 Mil. Euros for "Sustainable Food Systems"

Congratulations! **Selina Bruns** (Alumni 2015) for winning 2nd place in Europe at 3MT competition speech 2020



Selina's 3 min-speech (source: Youtube)

"Sometimes the most interesting things come from not looking what is there, but from looking at what is not there."

Selina Bruns (Alumni 2018) participated in the 3MT-Competition 2020. In this European contest, the challenge is to present your PhD work in three minutes in an interesting/ easy way. She won Göttingen in February and got selected to compete in the European finals against two other finalists.

"It was a wonderful experience as I was able to give the smallholder farmers a voice." said Selina.

She won second place for 2020 in Europe. Congratulations!

Watch her pitch by clicking [here](#).

SIA Alumni News

SIA Alumni Garden Update - Project Leader **Christian Stange**

Last year before the winter came we were able to plant some rows of garlic and explore this soil profile under our feet. These two projects were done by SIA students from the 2019-20 and 2020-21 generations. These activities represent just the kick-start of many future projects to be developed. I am sure that SIA garden can help students to make new relationships, develop leadership and gain confidence for the future.

The SIA committee of the garden works hand to hand with students, encouraging them to develop their own projects. practicing sustainable agriculture principles helping to create awareness about the environment without forgetting the social and economical aspects.

If you have an interesting idea and you want to join us at Sia Garden, you can contact us through my email to (c.stangemarcus01@stud.uni-goettingen.de) or through our SIA Alumni network (sia@alumni.uni-goettingen.de).



Projects and work on the alumni garden by SIA students and alumni

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all alumni who shared their storied with us. Also we would like to thank the incredible executive board for putting the 3rd Edition together:

Eusun, Pramila, Lydia, Mizanur & Justin.

Our 3rd Edition is refreshed. Let us know what you think of the new layout and design. Likewise if you have a story to share in the next newsletter, contact us :

sia@alumni.uni-goettingen.de

Reminders

Alumni is purely **voluntary** and communication may be delayed. We want to remind that you can also help us. Join the Executive Board working groups. Likewise if you have an idea or event you would like to share, contact us.

If you haven't registered with us please do so by the QR code:



Likewise please add us on LinkedIn and join our exclusive **SIA Alumni LinkedIn group** for exclusive job offers, reminders and updates. Click the icons below for a hyperlink.

