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Plan to phase out tobacco and plant roselle

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Government plans to phase out tobacco planting in line with its policy to discourage smoking while encouraging healthy living.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said his Ministry had identified several alternative crops and plants, especially the roselle, to replace tobacco planting while enhancing farmers' earnings.

The roselle, a specie from the hibiscus family that grows well on infertile and sandy soils, can be converted into juice, cakes and many different food.

"Tobacco is only for smoking," he told reporters after launching the roselle promotion at Bukit Bintang Plaza today.

Tobacco is mostly planted in Kelantan and Terengganu.

Dr Sulaiman said although the Government wanted to abolish tobacco planting as soon as possible, it was unrealistic since many farmers had traditionally planted tobacco and depended on it for their income.

Roselle, he said, can not only flourish on infertile and sandy soils but had been proven to contain more Vitamin C than most fruits.

Farmers can also make a gross profit and net profit of RM9,600 and RM1,740 respectively per hectare cultivated with the plant.

This is based on the farm price of 80 sen per kilogram of fresh roselle and an output of 12,000 kilograms per hectare.

The plant, which originates from Africa, was first introduced in Terengganu in 1993 as a cash-crop for poor farmers to improve their income.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had recommended the plant, encouraging the processing of roselle juice after returning from a visit to Africa in 1994.

At present, 335 hectares of land in Terengganu had been planted with roselle while Sarawak had utilised 600 hectares for the plant and is committing 2,500 hectares more.

Also present were Federal Agricultural and Marketing Authority (Fama) chairman Datuk Badaruddin Amiruldin and director-general Abu Bakar Abdul Hamid.

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