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Promoting herbs for use as medicines

TAPAH, Fri. - The State Agriculture Development Corporation is to set up a unit to promote and develop the use of herbal and spice plants to manufacture traditional medicines, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib said.

He said the rural folk, especially in traditional villages, would be enlightened about the medicinal and therapeutic value of herbs and spices in a bid to encourage them to grow such plants.

"We'll also provide plants to villagers to be grown on their land on a subsidiary or commercial basis," he said after touring the SADC-owned 20ha herbal and spice plant nursery at Sungai Selinsing near here yesterday.

He said villagers could supplement their income by supplying herbs to traditional medicine manufacturers.

Ramli added the unit would also carry out research to improve the quality of medicinal products and packaging.

For a start about 20 species of plants currently under demand are grown at the nursery. It was set up following Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call last year to States to venture into manufacturing of traditional medicines sourced from local herbs and spice plants.

Following this, the Cabinet allocated RM2 million as launching grant to the Perak and Selangor Governments to set up plants.

The nursery, which was set up to experiment soil and climate suitability of herbal and spice plants, would also constantly supply plants to be grown on a commercial basis at a 200ha site at Sungai Klah in Sungkai.

The site is managed jointly among SADC, Farmers Organisation Authority of Perak and the Agriculture Bank.

A company, Global Herba (Perak) Sdn Bhd, was formed last December to venture into the scheme on a big scale.

Earlier, Global Herba manager Zabidi Nawawi, who briefed Ramli on the development of the nursery, said the company was currently supplying herbs sought by a traditional manufacturer from Perlis.

"We are only growing plants that have a demand and commercial value," he said, adding the nursery staff were also collecting rare species of herbal plants for research purposes.

He said these rare species were grown at its herbal plant museum where its local and scientific names were displayed.

"We also explain for what purpose a certain herbal plant is used," said Zabidi who hoped the nursery would attract many visitors.

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