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From a bureaucrat to a gentleman farmer

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The nation's top farmer award may not bring celebrity status, but the story of Abdul Manaf Sulong, 50, will excite many.

Named the 1999 Peladang Jaya (male category) today, Manaf represents the modern breed of farmers who see fortune in farming.

A PTD or administrative and diplomatic service officer until three years ago, Manaf has invested RM500,000 in agricultural projects in Pahang, is a contract poultry farmer under Ayamas Food Corporation Bhd, hires 35 workers, and runs a mini-market.

He is also into aquaculture and sheep farming and has a coconut plantation and a durian orchard.

"And, Kentucky Fried Chicken has offered me a RM500,000 loan which will double my poultry output from the present 50,000 chickens per cycle of 37 days," Manaf told reporters after receiving the award which carries a cash prize of RM2,000 from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This was at the 1999 national-level Farmers, Fishermen and Livestock Rearers Day celebration and opening of the Asia Agricultural Exposition and Convention 1999, held at Stadium Putra, Bukit Jalil.

The farmer in Manaf developed early. "That's what I have always wanted to be," he said. In fact, even when he was still in the civil service, his family had started poultry farming.

Manaf has a Master's in Agriculture which he obtained while in the civil service. His last post in the civil service was as assistant secretary in the Health Ministry.

Manaf was asked by the Press later whether modern farmers like him could go on to become a millionaire. "You can work out for yourself," he said, providing some numbers.

In October last year, the NST featured Manaf and his poultry farm in Pekan under the heading of "Abdul Manaf has a rewarding life out of service too". He was in the civil service for 28 years.

The other winners are similarly enterprising. The top female farmer, Rohayah Ali, 43, from Merlimau, Malacca, went into full-time farming after the death of her husband last year. Now she has a 11.6ha orchard which she runs with seven workers.

She sells her produce at the pasar malam. She also sells sugarcane juice earning added value out of her sugarcane plantation.

The other winners are the Rengit Area Farmers Association in the top farmers' organisation category; Kulim Hilir Farmers' Unit in Kelantan (Farmers' Unit); Kuantan Fishermen's Association; Mat Hassan Mat Daud (top fisherman); Zahki Mohamad (entrepreneurship in the fishing industry); Azman Ariffin (entrepreneurship in livestock industry); and Ladang Kelompok Parit Haji Taib (cluster's category).

Fittingly, the Prime Minister in his speech, spoke of the need for commercial farming.

He said food estates should be established in the vicinity of the smaller farms so that they could benefit from such a venture.

Increasing food production and farm yield would be a boon towards improving the economy in terms of reducing the food import bill and checking inflationary trends, he said.

The Prime Minister said the farmers and fishermen must not remain poor.

He added that universities should introduce degree courses in farm

management other than rubber and oil palm.
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