

31/08/1999

Plan for UPM degrees in farm management

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Agriculture Ministry wants Universiti Putra Malaysia to offer degree courses in farm management in line with the country's needs to increase food production.

Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said today his Ministry was preparing a proposal for discussion with the university.

"We need to have more experts in farm management to specialise in food production. This is to ensure farms are managed efficiently and there is greater productivity," he said.

He was at the closing ceremony of the Malaysia Agriculture, Horticulture and Agrotourism Show (Maha) '99, the Asia Agricultural Exposition and Convention and the National Farmers, Fishermen and Livestock Rearers Day celebrations at Stadium Putra, Bukit Jalil.

During the launch of the events on Thursday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had suggested that local institutions of higher learning should introduce courses in farm management.

Dr Sulaiman said the Agriculture Ministry was already thinking along the same lines and was currently working on a plan.

"The moment our proposal is ready, we will approach UPM which is currently offering various courses in agriculture."

The country already has experts for the rubber, cocoa and oil palm sectors.

In the interim period, Dr Sulaiman has directed the Farmers' Organisations Authority (Lembaga Pertubuhan Peladang or LPP) to conduct short courses for those interested at existing agricultural institutes.

Those interested can go on to take degree courses after this training.

Earlier, in his speech, Dr Sulaiman directed the LPP to come up with proposals on how food production could be developed in a big way by small-time farmers and the private sector.

State Governments have already allocated vast tracts of land for State farmers' organisations to turn into food plantations run commercially and professionally with the aid of high technology.

Dr Sulaiman said the organisations could have joint ventures with the private or corporate sector for financial assistance or expert advice.

He also emphasised the need for the country to produce its own raw materials to support the food industry. He said the main problem faced by food manufacturers was lack of local raw materials.

Manufacturers are currently forced to import such materials which will not help in the country's efforts to reduce its import bill.

Dr Sulaiman cited the herbal industry as an example of how manufacturers were forced to source for materials from neighbouring countries.

"Based on the Ministry's initial estimate, food imports can be reduced to RM4 billion annually.

"The other RM7 billion worth of food can be produced locally if the industry increases its capability and ability to compete in the international market."

He also suggested that farmers venture into the halal food market, estimated to be worth some RM200 billion worldwide annually.

"There are some 1.2 billion Muslims around the world. Malaysia, as a Muslim country, can take advantage of this."

Some one million people have visited the exposition since its launch.

Dr Sulaiman also presented prizes to the three winners of the best stall

competition participated by 12 State farmers' organisations. The first prize of RM5,000 went to Pahang, the second (RM3,000) went to Selangor and the third (RM2,000) went to Terengganu.

(END)