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Agriculture

COOPERATE CLOSELY, POLICY MAKERS, IMPLEMENTORS AND SCIENTISTS TOLD

PETALING JAYA, May 14 (Bernama) -- Policy makers, implementors and scientists involved in the country's agriculture industry need to work closely to reduce the huge food import bill and make Malaysia a major food producer in the region, Agriculture Minister Datuk Dr Effendi Norwawi said today.

He said that the time had come for policy makers, implementors and scientists involved in food production to forge closer working ties as this would ensure policies were being made according to the needs of the nation.

"With the close working relationship between the three categories, the agriculture industry will experience a boom where scientists will be able to identify the areas which need strong national policies and obtain maximum output from the industry," he told reporters after opening the 11th scientific meeting and the 12th annual general meeting of the Malaysian Society for Molecular Biology and Biotechnology here.

"We (the three categories) should not be driven in three different directions...there should be some structural mechanisms where the three could come and work together for betterment of the industry and the nation," he said.

Effendi suggested that they hold regular dialogues from time to time, at least once every six months, to attain a closer working relationship to catch up on the latest in the industry and discoveries.

The country last year imported RM10 billion in food-related items while it is estimated that the figure will reach RM13 billion for this year.

"If we are successful in working closely with one another, then in the next five years we should be able to match exports with imports of our food bill...and become a prominent food producer in 10 years," Effendi said.

He said the creation of bio-valley, announced by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad while tabling the country's Third Outline Perspective Plan, would also be a catalyst in making this a reality.

He also said the formation of the National Biotechnology Council, consisting of scientists, policy makers and implementors, would be able to identify crops and commodities that the country could focus.

"We need to get a direction of where our agriculture industry is heading...we cannot continue the way we are today," he said.

To a question on herbal medicines, he said the ministry was undertaking an audit resource study on the local herbal industry and its market potential.

This audit resource study is being conducted by local as well as foreign experts here.

"We are very competitive in this area and we feel there is a tremendous market for this area of agriculture," he added.

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