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Making modern farmers of youths

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Agriculture Ministry has devised a programme to encourage youths to become modern-day farmers.

Minister Datuk Dr Mohd Effendi Norwawi said a pioneer project under its Belia Tani (Youths in Agriculture) programme would begin in Johor next week and later extended to other States.

"Most of our farmers are old. We decided on this programme as youths can be easily trained to use modern technology to replace traditional farming methods to modernise the agriculture sector."

Effendi said new land would be opened for participating youths, similar to that by the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) in the 1960s and 1970s.

"They will be encouraged to incorporate modern farming methods by using the latest technologies available to increase production, manufacture value-added goods and market them aggressively."

He said this after announcing the venue for this year's National Farmers, Livestock Breeders and Fishermen's Day 2001 celebration at Ladang Infoternak in Sungai Siput, Perak, from Aug 11 to 18.

The event, to be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will showcase new products, technology and a range of agriculture products.

Effendi said it was important to encourage existing farmers to modernise their farming methods to increase income and status.

To modernise the sector, he said the participation of the private sector was necessary.

"We have set up several councils to provide consultancy and advice on agriculture products to interested companies. We invite the companies to refer their ideas, views or problems to these councils."

These councils will recommend appropriate technologies to the farming community and assist in the manufacture and marketing of agriculture products.

He said many committees had also been set up to supervise the production, promotion and marketing of agriculture products like vegetables, fruits and livestock and there are many forums for discussions.

On another note, he said Malaysian agriculture products meant for export have to conform to internationally-acceptable standards.

Citing an example, Effendi said recently, a container of live prawns exported to a certain European country was rejected because it did not meet international hygiene safety standards.

"The consignment was rejected and all those Malaysian producers involved, suffered a loss as a result of the negligence of the container company.

"The ministry feels certain action must be taken against those who do not conform to international standards. This is a challenge when the Asean Free Trade Agreement (Afta) is implemented.