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Effendi-Transformation

MALAYSIA'S AGRI SECTOR CAN BE TRANSFORMED- NORWAWI

By: R Ravichandran

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 11 (Bernama) -- The National Agriculture Vision to transform the agricultural sector into a modern industry using technology and new management methods can be realised within the next five years or so, according to Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi.

He said such a transformation would not only change the fate of farmers, smallholders, fishermen and livestock breeders but also place Malaysia at the international level as a major food producer.

His ministry was aggressively changing the mindset and thinking of more than 95 per cent of the country's farmers towards this objective.

"We are persuading and convincing our farmers into leaving behind their traditional farming which is heavily dependent on the domestic market and start striving towards realising the national agriculture vision envisaged by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," Norwawi said over RTM's "Wawancara" programme aired last night. The panelists were Bernama Executive Editor Azman Ujang and Berita Harian's Assistant News Editor Kamal Ahmad. The programme moderator was Hambali Abdul Latif.

The Agriculture Ministry was getting good cooperation from other government agencies including the Rural Development Ministry in its efforts to realise the national agriculture vision, Norwawi said.

Effendi said nearly all states had extended their cooperation to the ministry and seven of them had so far signed agreements with the ministry to allocate a total of 50,000 hectares for food production.

To revolutionise the agricultural sector and realise the vision, the Agriculture Ministry had placed 12 of its agencies including Fama in a team which would help farmers, smallholders, fishermen and livestock breeders as well as those keen in joining the agricultural sector from the training stage to the marketing level.

All the agencies had also been assigned the task of looking out for the latest agricultural technology in all parts of the world for application in Malaysia if found suitable, he said.

Among the programmes given focus was the promotion of integrated farming with the merging of small-size farms for development by groups under a single management.

Effendi said for instance that at Kubur Panjang, Kedah, such an integrated farming had been very successful with padi yields of two tonnes from hectare increasing to 4.5 tonnes and later 7.2 tonnes and it would soon go up to 10 tonnes.

Effendi said a total of 821 integrated schemes would be developed with higher yielding grains and farm machinery as well as more systematic marketing programmes would be introduced.

He said the present problems faced by the agricultural sector could be due to the lack of serious attention being given such as that accorded to the industrial sector.

"However over the next five years we can see many changes and the important thing is to instil confidence in the farmers," he said.

Effendi said there was no reason why Malaysia could not emerge as a foremost food producer in the world as the country had proved its capabilities in the production of food items related to palm oil.

In this respect everyone should change his attitude, be receptive to technological changes and have the courage to try out new ideas, he said.

In transforming the agricultural sector, Effendi aspired to bring as

many youths including university graduates into the sector and turn them into successful agricultural entrepreneurs.

This would help ease the shortcomings faced by the sector which was heavily dependent on aging farmers.

The ministry would help in all aspects such as in opening up land, acquiring loans, providing technical service support, marketing and management, Effendi said.

Touching on the fate of the fishing community, said to have not changed much despite the rise in fish prices, he said they should switch to modern fishing technology and the ministry was ready to help out.

Effendi said to become a modern fisherman, it only required a little capital apart from good marketing strategy and in this respect the ministry was ready to help fishermen.

His ministry aspired to see the success of the entire target group and not just an entity involved in the target group such as the Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM).

Effendi said Fama had been given an important role in the area of venturing into the world market through promotion and branding campaign.

Nine types of local fruits, pineapple, jackfruit, papaya, starfruit, pomegranate, guava and durian would be promoted at international level, he added.

On the padi and rice industry which was faced with various problems, Effendi said Malaysia should be prepared to face the challenges arising from the Asean Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and there was only one choice -- improve the quality of production with low cost so as to remain competitive.

From the aspect of research and development (R&D), he said Malaysia had the internationally renowned Mardi (Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute) which would play a vital role in upgrading processing technology for the agricultural sector.

Asked whether many agricultural products were imported because of their better quality, Effendi said this was because they were cheaper and of good quality.

"However I am confident that we can compete with them... and with hardwork and preparation our farms can compete," he said.

Effendi's message to those in the agricultural and others who wished to be involved was that they should look upon agriculture as a business which could bring high returns and make them entrepreneurs rather than wage earners.

"I want them to open their hearts and minds and examine anew what we are proposing and see for themselves the new technologies and what was profitable and be bold enough to try out," Effendi said.

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