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Meat-ing the need

KEDAH-based Aman Agropreneurs Sdn Bhd is set to turn the Kedah Government's vision of Kedah as a regional halal food hub into reality.

The company set up the nation's largest cattle and goats farm over a 640-hectare plot of land in Naka with an initial investment of RM4.5 million in 1997 and has since become the leading supplier of fresh meat in Kedah, Perlis, northern Perak and also parts of south Thailand.

Managed by husband-and-wife team of Datuk Shazryl Eskay and Datin Razmah Kassim, Aman Agropreneurs relishes the prospects of eventually becoming the country's main supplier of quality, fresh halal meat. (The country's consumption of fresh meat is estimated to be a whopping RM460 million per year.)

Following its success in marketing meat to wholesalers from its farm over the years, Aman Agropreneurs is now one step closer to achieving this mission.

In September 2001, the company got a big break when the State Government offered it an opportunity to manage a RM22 million abattoir-cum-cold-storage facility in Paya Pahlawan, which had been abandoned for three years.

Aman Agropreneurs entered into a joint venture with the State Government to operate the state-of-the-art facility, known as the Kedah Halal Food Hub (KHFH).

While previous efforts to operate the abattoir failed due to lack of raw materials supply, Aman Agropreneurs is confident that it will succeed. Its strategy lies in its ability to secure a steady supply of meat. In July 2001, it bought a 30 per cent stake each in two abattoirs in India from which it imports frozen buffalo meat.

'As owners, we can control the price of the buffalo meat, and thus deliver savings to customers,' says Shazryl, the recipient of last year's Most Innovative Agropreneur award. 'To meet the ever increasing demand, we are also importing live cattle from Myanmar and Thailand and frozen meat from Australia and New Zealand.' The company, had also purchased a vessel to transport the imported cattle to Malaysia.

KHFH can now slaughter 1,200 heads of cattle and 2,000 goats per day, while the freezers at the facility - the largest in the country - can store 1,500 metric tonnes of meat, equivalent to 58 40-foot containers or one month's national supply. The company currently slaughters an average of 50 cattle and 30 goats per day.

The company's marketing strategy also includes the opening of a chain of meat shops, the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The first such outlet was officially launched by Kedah's Menteri Besar on Oct 23 in Alor Star. Thirty meat shops in Kedah, Penang, Perak and Kuala Lumpur are in the works for later this year, with another 100 franchised shops nationwide in a year.

'We hope to capture at least 30 per cent of the local meat demand once the meat shops are operational,' says Shazryl. 'Our approach in managing the meat shops would be similar to that of butcher shops in Australia where consumers are able to buy hygienic, fresh and attractively packed meat at competitive prices.'

He said the meat shop outlets would also offer spin-off products like satay, meat curry, kurma, dairy products and other Malaysian specialities. Such products would eventually also be exported, especially to Islamic

countries in line with the company's vision to become the leading producer of halal meat in the region.

Mobile units of these meat shops are also planned to service residential areas. Operated on a vendorship basis, the mobile units will allow roadside stall operators to participate in this spectre of Kedah's development. After all, this is what the Kedah Maju 2010 vision is about.