

24/08/2002

Planters reluctant to try cattle rearing

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PASIR MAS, Fri. - Many plantation companies, especially those in oil palm cultivation, are still reluctant to go into cattle rearing to boost the country's food production, Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi said.

He said this was despite the success shown by several plantations under Felda and Risda.

There are about four million hectares of land under oil palm cultivation which could accommodate about one million cattle.

"Malaysia now imports 70 per cent of its cattle. If all the plantations go into cattle rearing, we can reduce this by 30 per cent."

Effendi was speaking after giving away cattle to poor farmers at Kampung Bukit Pak Junuh here today.

He said the plantations were wary of the idea because of several factors, including viability, fear of damage to oil palm and administration problems.

The ministry would give attention to alternative planting programmes to help farmers, especially padi planters.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had instructed the ministry to boost the programmes to improve the farmers' income.

"Some of the farmers work in the field only a few days in a month.

"Therefore, they have a lot of time to plant fruits and vegetables, rear poultry and others."

Effendi added the various agencies under the ministry were ready to help as long as the farmers were willing to work hard to improve their income stream.