

**Herbal Industry To Contribute Rm2.2 Bln To Gnp By 2020 - Noh
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MELAKA, March 6 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's fast growing herbal industry is expected to contribute about RM2.2 billion to Gross National Product (GNP) by 2020.

Under the National Key Economic Area (NKEA) programme, it would also create 1,800 job opportunities and 300 entrepreneurs as well as increase the income of 1,500 farmers nationwide, Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar said today.

He said the herbal industry was one of the important industries in the development of health foods in Malaysia.

As the world market for herbal products expected to exceed RM2 trillion by 2020 from RM777 billion in 2009, the local herbal market was likely to grow 15 percent annually from RM7 billion in 2010 to about RM29 billion by 2020, he told reporters after opening the National Food Technology Seminar here.

Present were Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) Director-General Datuk Dr Abd Shukor Abd Rahman and Food Technology Research Centre Director Normah Omar.

Noh said farmers should grow herbs on a big-scale basis or mix it with other crops so that the industry's objective under the NKEA programme could be achieved.

The government also provided allocations for the farmers and entrepreneurs including to carry out research, he said.

One example, he said, RM25 million had been allocated for a local company to conduct clinical research on Tongkat Ali with a view to securing approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA).

"We hope with the assistance and grant provided by the government, our herbs receive the USFDA recognition to be marketed at pharmacies internationally," he said.

The three-day seminar that began today will see the tabling of 19 working papers on the latest developments in the country's health food industry.

"The health food industry has been expanding rapidly off late in line with the government's aspiration to encourage the participation of small and medium industry players in the industry," Abd Shukor said.

He said the health food industry gave lucrative returns, accounting between 30 and 40 percent of the RM30 billion food and beverage market.

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