



Planting Seeds

At the forefront in agriculture transformation is the Ministry of Agriculture, pushing forward with new ideas and new visions.

The mission is simple; to transform the agriculture and agro-based industry into a modern, dynamic and competitive sector hence positioning Selangor as a major world food exporter, developing the agriculture sector as not just the state's but the country's engine of growth

The agriculture sector is one of the key sectors of international trade given its importance in supplying food and raw material to the world's population. A state's resourcefulness in developing its agriculture sector is an indication of its ability in providing sufficient food for its population.

Dato' Mohd. Mokhtar Ismail, Secretary General at the Ministry of Agriculture says, "Developed countries such as the United States, Australia as well as the Netherlands have never neglected their agriculture sector. In fact the agriculture sector of these



Local fruits like jackfruit, pineapple, papaya and starfruit are in abundance.

Sweet corn is grown in Selangor too



countries have been successfully developed into competitive and profitable business entities." The vision is the same for Selangor and hence, Malaysia.

Selangor is blessed with fertile soil, abundant rainfall and suitable climate for food production. Malaysia however, is still a net food importer and has never achieved a food trade balance surplus. Realizing the opportunity and potential for the development of this sector, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry was entrusted with the responsibility to develop the agro food sector into a competitive entity and contribute significantly to national income.

Reaching High

"Efforts in transforming the sector is indeed a herculean task as it involves not only a

change from traditional farming methods to advance and modern farming methods but also entails the need for a mindset leap among the community from the old stigma of agriculture being a backward and low skills activity," Mokhtar, says.

"The shift in mindset and practices will only be made possible with the availability of accurate information on the importance and potential of the sector. Building from this, the ministry hopes that information regarding the agro-food sector development can be disseminated through a website to various stakeholders and interested parties."

The Ministry, with the founding of the Agrolink Portal (<http://agrolink.moa.my>) is assured that more needs can be met. This online website functions as an important and major reference and channel for the dissemination of information pertaining to the agro food sector to interested parties and stakeholders. The Agrolink Portal would hopefully be of mutual benefit to everyone especially in the Ministry's endeavour to enhance the contribution of the agro-food sector in national development.

The Role

The Department of Agriculture in Selangor currently functions to plan and formulate relevant policies, strategies and programmes for the development of the agro-food sector. The workforce here evaluate and coordinate the implementation of agro-food related development programmes and projects.

The department carries out agro-food related data and information collection as well as undertaking economic analysis based on the collected data and information. Planning and placing publicity programmes for advisory and agricultural extension services as well as for agricultural information management system is also one of the roles of this one stop agency on agro-food related expert and advisory services to the public and private sector

Their commitment is to increase the quality of services in developing the farmers, entrepreneurs and the private sector through the planning and formulation of policies and programmes. The implementation and coordination of policies and programmes is also coordinated by the department. This



The nutrient packed pumpkin



The vegetables widely grown here yield a bountiful crop, among them are tomatoes, chillies and ladies fingers

agency also conducts the verification and evaluation of policies and programmes that are related.

The state agriculture department also plays an important role in ensuring that services like the issuance of licence and permit, facilitation of financial facility, input and infrastructure development and marketing services, technology development services as well as agricultural information dissemination is carried out efficiently within the required timeframe.

With the Department of Agriculture set to play its role adequately, the agriculture sector will see a boom this year with hopes for harvest and fruitfulness in sight.

Selangor's Growth

Currently within Selangor itself there are a few goals to accomplish. "There is a need for an increase in productivity of food crops especially padi," Noorazimah Taharim, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Selangor informs us. "We are now currently looking into the mechanisation of padi planting. This is one way investors can come in. We seriously lack where

the mechanisation of planting padi is concerned with only 30% of the total padi area practicing machine-transplanting methods. The farmers currently use the direct seeding method because the facilities for machine transplanting is still inadequate what with a total of 19,000 hectares of padi land in Selangor. Direct seeding brings about problems like weedy rice that reduces the yield of padi. Our aim is to produce an average of 7.5 tonnes per hectare by 2012."

The new market trend of consumers wanting health food like organic crop will bring forth a spike in the production of these safe food. "It is obvious that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for healthy produce and we want to encourage the production of these as well," Noorazimah says. "R&D has already begun in this area and we are looking at controlling plant pests and diseases with non-chemical solutions, replacing them with organic substances. This will then reap us more and more organic food types that is after all, safe food."

Within Selangor, efforts are being made to create value-added products from agriculture waste. One example of this would be the padi

straws, which are recycled and made into compost. Research and Development (R&D) is also conducted where converting these straws into animal feed as well as erosion prevention sheets is explored. "We want to see many more Small Medium Entrepreneurs (SME) moving in this direction. This benefits everyone as it is an environmentally friendly move as well as a mode of business for others," Noorazimah says.

In agro-based industries like food processing, cottage industries are given a boost with a government initiative. These cottage industries are the producers of local favorites such as cassava chips or kerepek. "An umbrella system is erected in villages to support the SMEs and at the same time maintain quality of the produce. With the workforce as well as the raw materials supplied by the village people, the development of the entire village is gradually seen," says Noorazimah. These cottage industries have been growing by leaps and bounds with recent sightings of export to the Middle East and Hong Kong.

Herbs and spices is another big venture for the agriculture sector. "More and more

working women especially working mothers find ready-made sauces and spices come in very handy. This is reflected in the sales and demand of these products. Many private investors are going into this specific production line to meet the needs of the market."

Funds

The Ministry of Agriculture every few years attempt to give the private agriculture sector a boost with various types of funds. Anyone can apply for these funds for as long as 51% of the company is Malaysian-owned. This means that investors from overseas can apply for these government funds as well.

One particular fund, the 'Sciencefund' is specifically for the private sector investor and appeals to those who want to move into the commercialisation of agriculture developing. The purpose of the Sciencefund is to support R&D projects, which can generate new knowledge in the agriculture sector. The aim here is to develop and commercialize agriculture products as well as generate more research capabilities and expertise within the country.

The second fund is the "Technofund", which is positioned to enhance the growth of agriculture industries through the use

of new and innovative technologies. This will then in turn stimulate the growth and successful innovation of technology-based enterprises by increasing their level of R&D and commercialization.

The government is also running a program for opportunities in agriculture industry specific for the Klang Valley 2 area in Selangor. Investing companies are now given a tax deduction of up to 100% of their amount invested for up to 10 years if investment is made in food production activities.

The advantage of investing in the agriculture industry within Selangor is clear. Not only is the land fertile for growth, the industry is still young, making room for opportunities aplenty. Undoubtedly the infrastructure, ports, airports, gateways and self-

contained environment makes it worth the while. Bodies like the Malaysian Agriculture Department verifies and ensures that the state and country's agriculture needs are met and ensures a smooth ride.

