

'Johor farmers can be leaders'

By **Mary Victoria Dass** - August 12, 2024 @ 8:01am



Statistics Department officers inspecting a mussel farm operated by a group of Orang Asli in Kampung Kuala Masai, Pasir Gudang, on Friday. -NSTP/NUR AISYAH MAZALAN

PASIR GUDANG: The ongoing Agriculture Census 2024 by the Statistics Department in Johor has revealed that many farmers in the state have the potential to become trailblazers in the field of agriculture.

Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said according to the gross domestic product (GDP) report, the agriculture sector in Johor contributes 11.6 per cent to the state's GDP, with an added value of RM17.21 billion.

He added that the nationwide census process was proceeding smoothly, with 35.3 per cent completed.

He said the census, which began on July 7, had reached its 34th day and covered crops, livestock, fisheries, logging and timber.

To date, the census had involved 423,195 entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector nationwide, he added.

In Johor, he said, 193,095 residents and 3,134 business establishments in the agriculture sector had been visited, representing 36.6 per cent of all such properties in the state.

"A few of the people we met during the census are workers in the agricultural sector.

"The most important thing is gathering and obtaining information and data from the entrepreneurs themselves, including details related to yield, area and cropping methods.

"The government requires information on the percentage of technology use in the country's agriculture sector," he said at a press conference during the census in Kampung Pasir Gudang Baru here on Friday.

Mohd Uzir said he also wanted to gather background information on agriculture entrepreneurs to assess the sector's advancement.

He said this data would be used to identify the involvement of educated entrepreneurs and adapted knowledge in agricultural production technology.

He added that he constantly emphasised the importance of obtaining real, on-the-ground information.

"This is why I am leading the census team into the field to ensure our findings provide important inputs.

"On this occasion, we also meet the community and identify entrepreneurs who can be used as icons, as the agriculture sector in Johor contributes 11.6 per cent to the state's GDP, with an added value of RM17.21 billion."

For example, he said, there was a company in the state that previously cultivated oil palm, but had since switched to vegetable crops.

"It reported that its yield from planting 13 types of vegetables per acre of land is nine times higher than that from oil palm.

"I'm not saying that every entrepreneur needs to make such a change, but decisions like this allow us to address issues such as the lack of goods, especially food, and create many opportunities.

"With the right methods and technology, businesses can mitigate the effects of climate on yields."

Mohd Uzir said he was also proud of the efforts of a group of Orang Asli in Masai, who farmed mussels commercially.

"I had the opportunity to meet more than 90 families, or 300 residents, involved in the farming of mussels.

"Johor is recorded as the largest mussel producer in the country, with an annual production exceeding 2,000 metric tonnes and an export value of RM 4.7 million.

"I recognise the potential and hard work of those who started their business in 2003 and have since achieved good returns.



Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin (left) showing the farmed mussels in Kampung Kuala Masai in Pasir Gudang. - NSTP/NUR AISYAH MAZALAN

"Perseverance and the courage to change is at the core of the success stories of these farmers."

Mohd Uzir said in Muar, for example, some farmers had integrated upstream and downstream activities, adding that they cultivated livestock and vegetables on a 7.2ha site, sell their produce themselves, and also operate their own restaurants.

"In this scenario, issues related to the falling prices of their goods can be managed effectively because they do not depend on others to market their products.

"Our findings clearly show that the agricultural sector holds a lot of potential. We find that successful entrepreneurs combine agriculture with upstream, downstream and ancillary activities.

"Farming is no longer associated with hardship. What matters is craftsmanship and the data show that with the right techniques and technology, productivity and production can be increased."

He said many farmers needed to advance to a new level of agriculture.

"We are also working on producing profiles of entrepreneurs to assess youth involvement in agriculture.

"The older generation hopes for more youth involvement so that there is continuity, and we have observed veteran farmers guiding the youth, which is interesting.

"There are 70-year-olds mentoring young farmers, which is a good thing in this field."

He added that the average farmer also valued the role of related agencies and ministries.

"Some things need improvement and the data will be presented so that relevant agencies can address constraints and deficiencies.

"We have expertise only in statistics, while the agencies have expertise in their respective fields to manage the agricultural sector, and this close collaboration is essential."

The Agriculture Census 2024 plays an vital role in national planning and development, providing the information needed to generate agricultural indicators for socio-economic purposes.