

Gelombang Padi: Empower small padi farmers in Sarawak

KUCHING: The empowerment of padi farmers with small farming plots in Sarawak needs to be given attention to achieve the goals of the 'Gelombang Padi' initiative as announced by the Federal Government recently.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Bintulu Campus Director Prof Dr Shahrul Razid Sarbini said that unlike other states in the peninsula, padi farming activities in Sarawak, in general, are done on a small scale, decentralized and only for self-subsistence.

The expert in functional foods said, there are farmers in the Land of the Hornbills who plant padi as a supplementary income and only sell their harvest if they have excess harvest.

"In Sarawak, one of the best strategies to strengthen food security, especially rice, is to empower farmers with small farming plots who have been working their fields for generations.

"Our main challenge is to transform these padi fields to make them switch to modern, safe and sustainable farming methods to increase productivity to an optimal level," he said when contacted by Bernama.

Last Jan 16, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu announced that the Ministry would implement the "Gelombang Padi" initiative which outlines 12 programmes that would be a game-changer to transform the country's padi and rice industry to a more efficient and resilient level.

The programmes include introducing a new policy on the Certified Padi Seed Incentive (IBPS) programme; rehabilitation and development of soft soil padi land; strengthening the supply of agricultural inputs; and empowering the cultivation of hill padi in Sabah and Sarawak by providing provisions for the supply of agricultural inputs.

Meanwhile, commenting on the role that Sarawak can play in making the 'Gelombang Padi' initiative a success, Shahrul Razid said it has been the state's mission and desire to become a rice exporter by 2030.

To achieve that, Sarawak has, among others, established a padi planting scheme in the Stumbin-Bijat area in Simanggang and Tanjung Purun in Lundu.

"Apart from that, Sarawak is also working with the relevant agencies and universities to transform padi planting activities in Lubok Punggor, Gedong through the AgriHub@Gedong initiative led by Universiti Putra Malaysia Bintulu Sarawak Campus (UPMKB).

"This initiative intends to empower rice cultivation activities through good and sustainable agricultural practices, and also the use of smart agricultural technology," he said.

The 'Gelombang Padi' initiative also aims to achieve a 100 per cent rice self-sufficiency rate (SSR). Last year, the national rice SSR rate was only 65 per cent. - Bernama