

# Plant smart and eat smart for food security



**Self sufficient:** Consumers should look into starting urban gardens and the government should facilitate this, says Indrani.  
— AZMAN GHANI/The Star

WITH crop output and the yield of agrifood smallholders reported to be reduced due to climate change, the concern is also whether consumers down the line would be affected as well.

Reduced crop yields may trigger worries of food security, especially with specific crops that may react worse to climate change than others. Eventually, this may also affect the prices of goods and groceries for consumers too.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Institute of Tropical Agriculture and Food Security consultant Fellow Prof Datin Dr Fatimah Mohamed Arshad affirms that if production is affected, local supply will also be affected.

“Lower supply in the face of growing demand may cause price increases,” she says.

This further highlights the need for the production of food crops to become more resilient and efficient.

“There is no shortcut to it,” Prof Fatimah adds.

Consumers, however, can minimise the effects of this phenomenon by working on their consumption habits.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers’ Associations (Fomca) vice-president and legal advisor Indrani Thuraisingham says Malaysian consumers need to start looking into methods of increasing food security at the consumer level.

“We have to go back to what we used to do before – kitchen gardens, urban gardens.

“We’ve got so much idle land but these idle lands are not available in residential areas.

“We can see harvests are failing but I think we can supplement them by consumers themselves having kitchen and urban farms,” Indrani says.

Currently there is too much bureaucracy and red tape to go through if residents wish to use idle land to start community farms, she says.

“So I think we need to have policies in place where idle land would be readily available for communities who show an

interest in growing their own food.

“This can address our potential food security issues.”

In 2023, Putrajaya said it was looking to increase food production by using abandoned lands owned by the Federal Land Development Authority, the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority, and the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority with an area up to 320ha for food crops.

“If we can actually use that land to grow food items, we can counter or balance out issues where agrifood producers are facing these climate challenges,” Indrani says.

Aside from making use of idle land for urban or community farming, Prof Fatimah encourages consumers to try planting vegetables and fruits around their own home if they have extra space.

Consumers should also try to avoid food waste, she adds.

Indrani says consumers also have to adapt to the changing times by changing our diets too.

“Sometimes we are so into what we eat that we just have to have a particular food item.

“Meat products have a high carbon footprint but a lot of us feel like, oh no, we have to have our chicken, beef, and so on, but I think as consumers, we have to change our behaviour,” she says.

Of course, Indrani acknowledges that certain essential grocery items such as spices will remain expensive but this is where the government can play its role in monitoring and maintaining prices, she says.

This problem with crops affected by climate change is also something Fomca is trying to address due to its trickle down effects on the consumer.

To understand the challenges faced by both farmers and consumers, the NGO is organising a workshop soon with farmers, fishermen and livestock breeders, says Indrani.

“We basically want to see how we can raise the farmers’ voice.”