

Govt fish farming initiative empowers participants

➤ Project exposes group members to marketing methods, skills to produce downstream products and experience to handle various scenarios, including failure

PUCHONG: The efforts of the inaugural group of the People's Income Initiative-Agro Entrepreneur project in the aquaculture sector have proven worthwhile as the red tilapia they had been rearing reached maturity and became marketable.

Their determination to improve their economic situation has been fruitful and Zulkefli Shafie, 40, shared the good news, having tended to 12 fish cages for almost five months at the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) fish hatchery centre.

The Selangor-born participant said if participants sold all the fish from the 12 cages, they could expect an income of up to RM24,000.

"Our income is RM2,000 per month but after joining the project, it may reach RM6,000. We can already witness the effectiveness of the project. I hope the government will continue this initiative."

He shared his experience of participating in the project and said each participant initially tended to four fish cages, but the number has increased to 12 as the fish have grown larger.

"We each have 12 cages with between 400 and 500 fish per cage," he said, adding that five participants begun harvesting yields in the beginning of June when they received requests from customers, including friends and colleagues.

"I have sold 15kg of fish. Today, there is a sales event where customers can go to the cages to pick their fish. I aim to increase sales at the event."

He said marketing was not a problem because the group had been exposed to relevant knowledge by UPM instructors, including fish farming and marketing methods.

He also said the project demonstrates potential to empower participants and contribute



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to food security, paving the way for future agricultural entrepreneurs.

In February, red tilapia were reared by five participants from the group as the species is easy to manage, highly resilient and fast growing, Bernama reported.

All participants started working in December last year after attending guidance classes from UPM instructors in September.

Assahril Azuan Alid, 43, has sold 34kg of fish and expects sales to increase as he has been receiving encouraging requests from buyers through social media.

The Perak-born participant wants to own a fish farm and said the knowledge he has gained and is practising should not be wasted.

"I joined the project due to my interest. Before, I farmed catfish as a hobby. However, when I found out about the project, I applied and now I am one of the participants farming caged fish without having to provide capital."

UPM deputy vice-chancellor (Industry and Community Relations) Prof Dr Hang Tuah

Baharuddin said the university has implemented a mandate given by the Economy Ministry to make the project a success by providing training and locations for participants to carry out modern agricultural activities.

"What we see today (fish cages) is part of the project. We want to produce modern farmers and breeders who use the latest technology in producing food sources."

Sharing the project module for aquaculture, he said UPM has set three rounds of breeding to train participants to handle various scenarios, including failure.

"If one of the rounds fails, at least the participants will learn how to face failure. We (UPM) do not only teach how to farm fish but want participants to have experience and knowledge before venturing into large-scale farming."

He added that each participant was exposed to skills to produce downstream products, such as frozen fish and fish fillets, as added value to existing products and to avoid wastage.