

UPM eyes industry-ready agropreneurs

SERDANG: Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has designed a blueprint to develop skilled agropreneurs capable of facing challenges in the food security sector.

Its Food Security chair, Professor Datin Dr Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, said the blueprint was a combination of a structured framework and forward-looking achievement strategies.

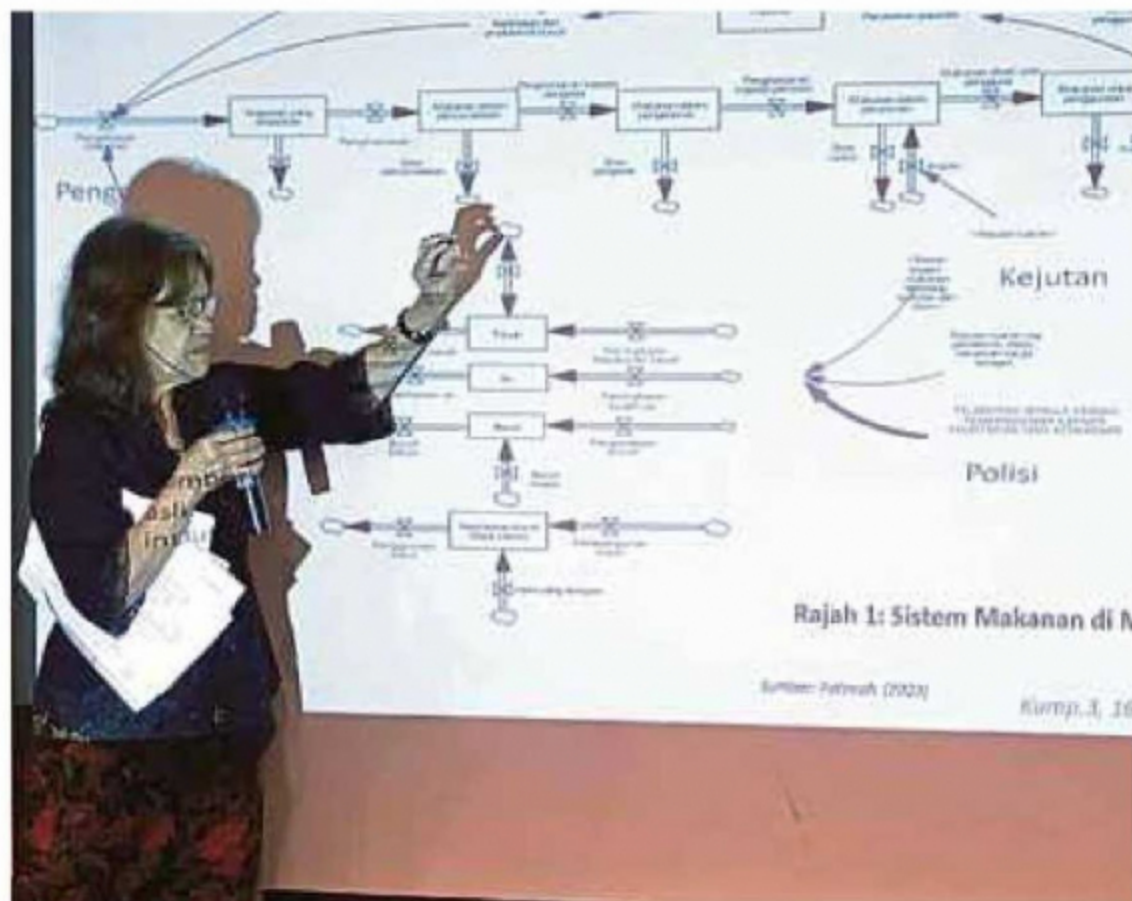
She said the current changes in weather, global conflicts, disruptive technology, changing population dynamics and the wide gap between the rich and the poor made food security important.

"One possible solution is to build an integrated ecosystem that can achieve our outlined goals.

"The ecosystem needs to be robust and integrative, especially in terms of technology transfer to the community and be engaging with our stakeholders, which include policymakers, industries, consumers, fishermen, livestock breeders and farmers."

She said the country's lack of focus on the farming sector was unfortunate, given that Malaysia was rich in natural resources for the production of vegetables, fruits, rice, livestock and fisheries.

"We are not like other countries as our soil is very fertile if treated



Universiti Putra Malaysia Food Security chair Professor Datin Dr Fatimah Mohamed Arshad presenting the blueprint, which takes into account the future global challenges and the need to address local food insecurities. PIC COURTESY OF UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

properly. It's as if you throw a seed anywhere, and it can easily grow.

"Additionally, we are blessed with sunlight, humidity, water, fishery resources, biodiversity and adequate land. We have all the crucial elements needed to produce enough food for the country."

She said the blueprint, designed to meet current demands, had the potential to produce agropreneurs who are well-equipped in sustainable and smart farming technologies.

"We have outlined three main leaps, one of which is the 'Achieve-

ment Leap', encompassing the excellence of graduates and agricultural entrepreneurs, the usability of technology and innovation, and the empowerment of the farming community.

"The first leap is the 'Core Leap', which covers academic excellence, research and innovation impact, as well as community and industry engagement.

"The second leap is the 'Enabling Leap', which includes governance efficiency, financial sustainability, talent availability, infrastructure sophistication, global collaboration and networking, and strategic communication.

"To drive this leap, we target impactful results in four aspects: better production, improved nutritional quality, enhanced environmental quality, and improved quality of life."

Fatimah said UPM's blueprint was more structured and futuristic, taking into account the future global challenges and the need to address local food insecurities, such as poor nutrition, which leads to the problem of stunting and vulnerability of supply due to shocks and climate challenges.

"We have involved various stakeholders, including relevant faculties, academic and non-academic

staff, government agencies, the private sector and farmers, to implement the blueprint."

Previously, UPM held two conferences with stakeholders during the National Food Security Conference and the Community Farming Conference, last year.

The two conferences engaged stakeholders in intensive discussions on national food security issues, providing up-to-date input on current and future food requirements.

Fatimah hoped that with the blueprint, the university could generate well-trained human capital and agropreneurs to function as leaders in sustainable and high-tech agriculture — crucial to energise the local food sector to fulfil local demand as well as exports.

"These students will receive practical training in the field so they can enter the industry independently.

"This will make them leading innovative agropreneurs in technology and climate smart agriculture in the near future."

She said they had identified various disciplines and research areas to achieve better production, nutrition, environment and life in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.