

# Ginger cultivation brings new spice of life to Kota Tinggi farmers

VILLAGERS in Kota Tinggi, Johor, are investing in ginger cultivation as a high-value crop to bolster local food security.

While farming ginger might seem straightforward, first-time ginger farmer Mihat Mohad described it as a “sensitive plant.”

His dedication to ginger farming is driven by the aspiration for Kota Tinggi to develop its own unique species.

“We hope that eventually, we can cultivate our very own Kota Tinggi ginger species and transform it into a reliable source of income for the local community,” he explained.

Mihat’s vision is grounded in the work of Universiti Putra Malaysia’s (UPM) Institute of Tropical Agriculture and Food Security (ITAFoS) consulting fellow Dr Hawa Jaafar.

She has worked out a plan to develop a ginger species suited to Kota Tinggi’s unique conditions.

“Our long-term goal is to develop a ginger species adapted to Kota Tinggi’s conditions.

“It will take two to three planting cycles for the crop to stabilise and adapt to local conditions, but we are confident it can be done,” she said when met at a ginger farm in Kampung Gembut, Sedili.

Since joining a Bentong ginger planting initiative in October last year, Mihat, from Kampung Tuan Seh, discovered that ginger was prone to disease, with dark spots forming if not properly managed.

“You need the right temperature, fertiliser and drainage.

“Even though I have been farming vegetables for the past



Kampung Gembut villagers Faiezuddin Mohammad Azhar and Wan Norfatin Wan Zainal cleaning ginger after harvesting the crop.

seven years, ginger farming is quite new to me.

“What is interesting about Bentong ginger is that the leaves emit a light and fragrant ginger aroma,” said the 43-year-old.

He said participants in a ginger cultivation programme organised for Kota Tinggi folk, underwent two training courses where UPM’s experts and Johor Agriculture Department officers shared knowledge and best practices to help in their ginger cultivation journey.

Mihat joined the programme under the umbrella of Koperasi Wawasan Tuan Seh Tanjung Sedili Kota Tinggi Bhd where he is the secretary.

The cooperative managed to plant 1,200 ginger plants since last October, making it among the highest yield in the programme.

The crops are planted in stages to allow for staggered har-

vests and steady income, said Mihat.

“Young Bentong ginger is harvested after six months. It fetches a higher market price.

“We sell it for RM40 per kg, which is higher compared to ginger imported from China, Indonesia and Thailand.

“It can be used as medicine, in cooking or even consumed raw. Our hope is to one day sell it beyond Kota Tinggi,” he added.

The ginger cultivation programme, spearheaded by UPM, involved 30 participants from seven villages in Kota Tinggi.

Hawa said the programme’s participants were monitored, with about 5,000 ginger plants being cultivated to date.

She said the initiative aimed to reduce Malaysia’s reliance on imported ginger, which made up more than 80% of supply based on data from 2022 to 2023.



Mohamed Khaled (second from right) and Hawa (left) at the launch of the young Bentong ginger harvesting programme in Kampung Gembut, Johor.

Hawa, who has over two decades of experience working with herbs including *kacip fatimah*, also sits on the Malaysian Herbal Monograph committee – a project involving various agencies working to promote Malaysian medicinal plants and grow the country’s herbal industry.

Highlighting the many health benefits of ginger, she said, “It is rich in antioxidants and phytochemicals, which give it disease-preventing and anti-inflammatory properties.

“It can boost immunity and help fight infections.

“A simple way to enjoy it is to slice it thinly, steep in hot water, add honey and drink, daily.”

Hawa said the project was about more than just increasing agricultural output.

“Our vision is to create opportunities for the less privileged, especially single mothers and

the poor, so they can earn an income through farming.

“Beyond planting, we are also encouraging downstream activities such as producing ginger powder, which commands a higher market price.”

She said the project received support from Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, who is Kota Tinggi MP.

The minister launched a young Bentong ginger harvesting programme in Kampung Gembut on June 21, where he said locally grown ginger had the potential to penetrate the international market due to its unique features such as strong aroma, distinct spice level and less fibrous pulp.

“With support from the community and government leaders, we hope this initiative can be expanded to other parts of Johor and even nationwide,” Hawa added. — By YEE XIANG YUN