

# Bad seeds pose a serious threat to food crops, say experts

**PETALING JAYA:** Hundreds of crops have been lost due to non-native diseases and pests, which are among the main reasons why Malaysia needs a law to control seeds, say agricultural experts, in response to protests against a proposed Bill.

However, the academics also said that the Bill must strike a balance between the need to protect crops so that consumers have sufficient food and the interests of traditional farmers.

The new law, tentatively called the Seed Quality Bill, aims to make it mandatory for farmers who store, process, sell and share seeds to get a licence from the

government. Their seeds must also be tested at an approved laboratory.

Farmers and NGOs protested the new Bill at the recent sitting of Parliament, calling on the government to review the proposed law.

Agriculture economist Datuk Prof Mad Nasir Shamsudin said that the proposed law can have both advantages and disadvantages and its impact will depend on how well it is designed and executed.

"The real issue is balance. A rigid licensing system may protect consumers but harm farmers," said Mad Nasir, a former

dean of Universiti Putra Malaysia's Agriculture Faculty.

"What is needed is a nuanced approach. One that ensures seed safety without delegitimising traditional, sustainable practices.

Making seed licensing mandatory can improve seed quality control, curb the sale of counterfeit and disease-infected seeds, and potentially lead to better harvests, said Mad Nasir.

"The licensing framework could potentially standardise seed quality, provenance, and safety".

However, the law could also potentially harm farmers by raising costs, restricting seed-saving

or sharing and reducing local control and diversity, Mad Nasir added.

In its current form, the new law could also prohibit traditional seed practices, threaten farmers' rights, and create monopolies for big agricultural companies, said Mad Nasir.

"If designed properly, licensing can also improve seed quality and spur innovation".

Food security expert Datuk Prof Abdul Shukor Juraimi said the absence of a law to control their quality has led to the spread of seeds from foreign countries, which bring diseases and pests not native to Malaysia.

"There are now many crop diseases that in the past did not exist in Malaysia and they have caused farmers to lose harvests," said Abdul Shukor, also of UPM.

"These diseases have seriously destroyed banana, dragon fruit and rice crops. Licensing for seeds will tackle this problem".

Abdul Shukor argues that farmers will unlikely be affected by such a law, as they should be able to apply for licenses to produce and distribute seeds.

"The issue of monopolies, therefore, does not arise. Only those who have skirted the rules in the past will be affected by this new law."