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Advancing agro-based research

TAKING the next step sums up Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) approach to research.

The university now aims to create an environment that inspires innovative research following its selection as a research university by the Higher Education Ministry in November 2006.

Vice chancellor Professor Datuk Nik Mustapha R Abdullah says UPM hopes to play an active role in making Malaysia a modern agricultural country and a *halal* hub.

The strong agricultural background of the university was rooted in its inception in 1971.

Its previous name was Universiti Pertanian Malaysia and the institution had placed a premium on agricultural research.

"Currently, UPM is focusing on

research areas such as food crops; plantation crops; animal and aquaculture production; bio-health; alternative renewable energy; and *halal* products, among others," says Nik Mustapha.

The focus on *halal* food research is in line with the government's plans to make Malaysia an exporter of food products to Muslim consumers globally.

Launched in April 2006 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the demand for *halal* food products has since increased from

Middle Eastern countries and smaller Muslim societies across the globe.

UPM, which is keen to produce more postgraduates to help boost its research capabilities, recently launched the *Postgraduate Exhibition 2008* themed *Taking the Next Steps at the Research University*.

"At the moment UPM has 7,131 postgraduates. It wants to increase the number to 10,000 by 2010."

UPM also plans to expand its areas of research. Future focus will be on biotechnology, biodiversity, gerontology and nanotechnology,



Nik Mustapha

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among others. The university hopes that the economy and society will benefit from effective knowledge transfer, appropriate management of intellectual property and development of applications for research findings.

As a research university, UPM receives RM53m in annual grants. The other three research universities are Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and University of Malaya. — **By MOHD NOOR ASWAD**