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Homegrown vanilla may take on global market

KUALA LUMPUR: Local vanilla may soon be exported on a large scale.

The crop, which fetches up to RM380 per kg in the global market, is space effective and grows exceptionally well here, said Vanilla Biomatrix Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Syed Isa Syed Alwi.

"Our goal is to plant five million vanilla seedlings in the country by 2010," added Syed Isa, who is also the CEO of Rentak Timur Sdn Bhd, the sole commercial producer of vanilla in the country.

He was speaking at a seminar, jointly organised by the two companies, Malaysian Herbal Sdn Bhd and Universiti Putra Malaysia, to get local farmers and entrepreneurs to take up vanilla planting.

The Malaysian Vanilla World Market seminar was earlier opened by Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry secretary-general Datuk Zulkifli Idris.

A memorandum of understanding was also signed between Vanilla Biomatrix and UPM to work together in research and development related to vanilla.

Syed Isa said the vanilla planted by his company was from the *Vanilla Planifolia Andreeus* variety, which was suitable for commercial planting and was of high quality.



Seminar participant Siti Salwa Salleh with a vanilla plant.

He was confident Malaysia would be able to overtake Indonesia, which was the second largest producer of vanilla with 21 per cent of the world market share.

Currently, there are several vanilla plantations in Pahang,

Johor, Sabah and, more recently, in Selangor.

With 60 per cent of the global share, Madagascar is the biggest producer of vanilla while the US, France, Germany and the UK are the biggest consumers of vanilla in the world.