

UPM in solar power, tea venture

KUALA LUMPUR: Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has embarked on a landmark venture with a private company to generate solar energy and commercially cultivate *misai kucing* or *orthosiphon stamineus*.

Process and Food Engineering Department senior lecturer Dr M. Effendy Ya'acob said the university entered into the joint venture with Solar System and Power Sdn Bhd at the beginning of the year.

The company has pumped in RM18.5 million as well as leased a 3.04ha plot of UPM land next to the Puchong Forest Reserve to set up the solar panels.

UPM then plants *misai kucing* under the panel to harvest tea leaves.

"We estimate that the dried tea leaves will yield RM40,000 to RM60,000 in sales next year."

He said the university planned to grow and harvest the crop four times a year.

Effendy, who is also an affiliate researcher with the Centre for Advance Power and Energy Research, said the product had yet to hit the market.

"We are working on the details such as pricing and profit sharing."

Solar System and Power generates 7.6 megawatt hour per day and earns RM210,000 to RM220,000 a month from selling the energy back to Tenaga Nasional Berhad at RM0.88 per kilowatt hour.

It has earned RM1.76 million from eight months of sales.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Wilfred Madius Tangau said the ministry had commercialised 67 science, technology and innovation based products this year.

He said the ministry targeted to market another 60 next year, adding that the ministry was looking at the policy and disbursement of funds under the ministry.

"I would like to make it mandatory for those receiving grants to have commercialisation in mind and not just to have 'paper' as output. Anyone can write a research paper, but, more importantly, researchers must produce a tangible product that should be ready for commercialisation.

"This is what we call science business. Science must create worth and value for society."



Dr M. Effendy Ya'acob