

# Produce career-minded agronomists

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's call to rejuvenate the agricultural sector is apt and timely.

Agriculture remains a strategic and sustainable industry, encompassing food, forestry, fishery and veterinary services, among the most developed countries of Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan.

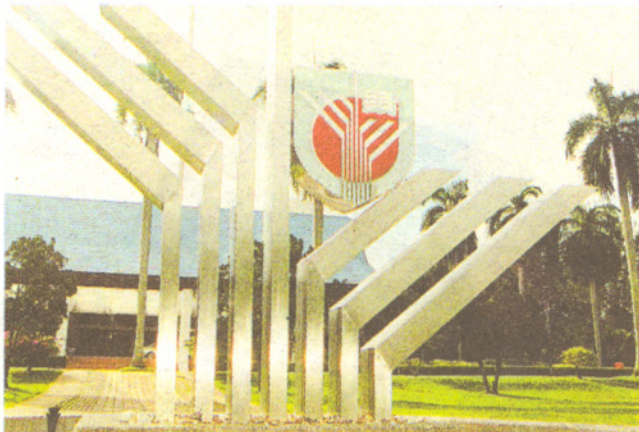
For Malaysia, a country endowed with natural resources, making agriculture a strategic and sustainable industry should be the priority.

Universiti Putra Malaysia, with 76 years of history since it was set up as an agriculture school in 1931, has undergone a series of changes, first as the Agriculture College (1948), then Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (1971) and now Universiti Putra Malaysia (1997).

The university has remained the champion of agricultural development at national and international levels.

UPM comprises 16 faculties and nine institutes, with 30,000 students at the bachelor's and postgraduate levels.

Agriculture is the mother of



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all sciences. Thus, the university should focus more on agriculture-related disciplines.

However, a look at UPM's applications annually will reveal that it is the last-choice programme for most students.

This mindset has to change. There has to be a passion among its practitioners if agriculture is to make a difference.

Perhaps a better process of interviewing would result in attracting the right candidates.

UPM must develop agronomists who will make meaningful careers out of it and not just earn a living until something better comes along.

UPM and other universities are also offering agriculture-based programmes and, jointly, all these universities should be able to cater to the needs of the country.

Malaysia has come a long way in certain sectors, but there are many areas that

could bear us better results with the use of research and development.

The more than 30 agricultural institutes in the country could be upgraded and turned into branches of UPM, with each specialising in an area of agriculture.

The UPM Alumni Association feels that UPM will be more than willing to collaborate on this. There will be much less cost involved and it will be akin to having UPM as the "central kitchen".

It would also be more meaningful if the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry, Higher Education Ministry, the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) and all government agencies, universities and training institutions collaborate to draw up a master plan for the industry which will act as a guide to all institutions of higher learning in the agricultural sector.

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