

Need to address and enhance food security

FOOD security relies on the availability of a sufficient quantity and quality of nutritious food for a population.

In the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 2015 Global Food Security Index, Malaysia was placed at 34th out of 109 countries, but was far behind Singapore, which was ranked second as the most food secure country in the world, behind only the United States and five other neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region.

This presents a major opportunity for improvement and, as one of the major food producing countries in the region, there is more to be focused on food security needs, particularly from the food production industry.

At present, the importance of food security in Malaysia is perceived from the perspectives of supply and demand based on the agricultural sector, mostly focus-

ing on industrial crops and food.

Like any other developing country, Malaysia has enjoyed the benefits of cheaper food imports.

This has indirectly impacted industries by stressing the need to enhance productivity and efficiency and, during the food crisis in 2008, the country struggled to secure adequate food supply for the population.

It is commendable that Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), in 2014, established a Food Security Centre as an initiative in its 2014-2020 Strategic Plan which encompasses academic programmes and strengthening its engagement with the industry, which includes the University-Community Transformation Centre.

In the face of enhancing the country's food security, a component identified in the Critical National Infrastructure, it is timely that the agenda of Food Defence be brought to light as an integral part of promoting food security, particularly in food manufacturing environments.

Food defence complements the entire "farm to table" concept by addressing concerns on intentional contamination, deliberately caused by criminal and subversive elements such as terrorism, with concerns ranging from attacks of biological, chemical, radiological or even physical means.

Perhaps UPM, in collaboration with relevant government agencies, such as the Home Ministry, may want to consider this aspect of food security in its initiative to raise awareness and also as a need as the country moves toward a more globalised environment, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership which addresses issues pertaining to security and defence as one of its key initiatives.

To be ahead of the game, food industry players need to open up to a broader scope of security awareness and implementation beyond their conventional perception of demand and supply as an integral key component in their corporate culture.

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