FEEDING CITY PEOPLE

FARMING IN THE CITY

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As world population increases, urbanisation moving in tandem, more people are expected to live in the cities. By 2025, it is estimated that 60 to 85 per cent of the world’s population will be considered as city dwellers. In Malaysia, it is predicted that the urban population will increase to 75 per cent in three years.

Rapid urbanisation is pulling poverty and food insecurity into cities, given the fact that urban dwellers are actually net food buyers and depend largely on cash income to access food.

In fact, the urban poor are vulnerable to food price shocks and always suffer most from higher food prices, which eventually could lead to food insecurity since food comprises a substantial part of urban household expenditure.

Food production has always been associated with rural environment. In fact, to feed the urban population, it is assumed that relying on rural food production would be sufficient. However, this turned out to be rather inaccurate – urban agriculture itself is able to cater to food demand for urban population, given that it is practised in a proper way.

Urban agriculture is defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as any agricultural activity which grows, raises, processes and distributes agricultural produce, regardless of land size and number of human resources within the cities and towns.

Studies from both developed and developing economies claimed that urban agricultural activities can contribute to the availability of fresh and nutritious food items, reduction in food expenditure and having direct access to varieties of food products.

Studies in 15 countries show that urban agricultural activities are closely related to food security, dietary diversity and nutritionally adequate diet.

Furthermore, urban agriculture also plays an important role to the climate change problem. It can green the city and improve the urban climate, while encouraging the reuse of urban organic waste and reducing the urban energy footprint.

Having recognised the importance of urban agriculture, the Malaysian government gave its full support towards this activity. This can be seen from the formation of the urban agriculture division under the Department of Agriculture Malaysia in 2010 to promote, among others, agricultural activities in the city to reduce the cost of living of the urban community.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has designed and developed several affordable vertical farming methods, which can be adopted by the urban poor.

The technology is suitable for flat dwellers with limited and unsuitable growing space. Vertical farming is the practice of producing food and medicine in vertically stacked layers, inclined surfaces or integrated in other structures, such as in a skyscraper, used warehouse or shipping container.

The modern idea of vertical farming use indoor farming techniques and controlled environment agriculture (CEA) technology, where all environmental factors can be controlled.

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