

Engaging youths as agropreneur

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SIXTY-seven graduates from higher education institutions all over the country completed a six-month agricultural entrepreneurship training under Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Agropreneur Incubation programme recently.

The programme which ended last month was carried out at the UPM campus in Serdang, Selangor. The participants were taught five modules including aquaculture, rockmelon crop, and hybrid village fowl.

During the first two months of the programme, students were exposed to the entrepreneurship aspect of their modules such as effective business negotiations and business plan development. While the final four months required them to carry out their chosen projects in the field.

They were divided into groups and each group received a loan of up to RM10,000 to kickstart their projects.

Safinur Chin, 29, from Gurun, Kedah, said she gained invaluable experience over the last six months learning about fertigation, the application of fertiliser via irrigation channels.

At the beginning of the programme, Safinur was clueless and didn't know where to start, but she managed to take it one day at the time until she graduated.

"My intention was to learn something outside the box and challenge myself. I admit that I was a bit lost but my trainers and peers helped me pull through.

"It was a hands-on experience and worked hard to ensure that I fulfilled the requirements to graduate," said Safinur, who is currently doing her Master's in Applied Linguistics at UPM.

She believes this programme also helped to address the rising rate of unemployed graduates. "In a way, it helps create graduates with entrepreneurial skills in the agricultural sector.

"Those undertaking the course could become entrepreneurs in their own right or gain employment as the skills and knowledge gained were invaluable," she added.

Safinur who has her own company in Kedah said she plans to start a banana plantation once she completes her Master's course.

"For now, I will try to find my own capital to venture into the business, while looking for any available grants offered from companies such as the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) and others."

Another participant Muhammad Fahsya Iskandar Rahman, 25, said his passion was in cattle rearing and he is running his own business focused on the local market for the moment but he aspires to go global one day.

Fahsya said one of the benefits under the programme was getting loans to kickstart their businesses from AgroBank.

"I found out about this programme through a Facebook posting and thought that it was a good opportunity for me to grow, both in terms of self-development and business-wise. Even though I have some experience in business but I want to



The participants from the Agropreneur Incubation Programme 2018 received their certificates and MyAgrosis card at the graduation ceremony held at Agriculture Faculty in UPM Serdang campus recently. PIC BY HALIM SALLEH



Safinur Chin



Muhammad Fahsya Iskandar Rahman

have a paper qualification and a proper knowledge to becoming a successful entrepreneur," said the UPM Bintulu, Sarawak diploma holder.

He said the programme allowed him to explore many things, whether in theory or in practice, as long as he was committed to learning and gaining knowledge.

"What I love about the programme was that I had the opportunity to 'get my hands dirty' in the field with four months of practical sessions. I learned how to handle the cattle in the real world.

All participants became members of the Agriculture Graduate Entrepreneurs Club (MyAgrosis), UPM, that would enable them to obtain loans from Agrobank and Tabung Ekonomi Kumpulan Usaha Niaga (Tekun) to fund their projects upon completion of the course

Since its inception in 2012, the programme has produced more than 300 young entrepreneurs and many of the graduates have set up their own companies involved in fishery, plantation and animal rearing.

UPM deputy vice-chancellor (academic and international) professor Dr M Iqbal Saripan said this programme not only provided opportunities for graduates to generate an income but help the industry produce a quality food supply.

"The university will fully support any efforts in implementing agricultural projects and ready to provide hands-on training to individuals who are interested in studying agriculture.

"We will also continue to make Agropreneur Incubation programme as a model for other universities in order to generate graduates who are competent and equipped with



Professor Dr M. Iqbal Saripan (left) with Agriculture Faculty dean Professor Abdul Shukor Juraimi (third from left) sharing a light moment with some of the participants.

entrepreneurial attributes.

"With the direct assistance from the financial institution, it will help these young graduates to shape the future of the country's agricultural sector," he said at the closing ceremony of UPM Agropreneur Incubation Programme 2018.

The main objective is to produce entrepreneurs among graduates specifically in the field of agriculture while at the same time strengthening UPM efforts in encouraging students to venture into entrepreneurship.

"The pact that has been forged with UPM is an important initiative to create a better synergy between academia and industry, particularly for the efforts of both sides to strengthen the country's agricultural industry and provide more opportunities for young people to pursue excellent career opportunities in agro-based business," said Iqbal.