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LETTERS

FOOD SECTOR

EMULATE INDUSTRIAL CROP PRODUCTION

IN food production, there are few commercialised farms that are market-oriented and involved in experiments to improve productivity.

The average farm is generally small and not conducive for profitable farming. For example, in rice production, there are about 0.3 million padi farmers, of whom only 40 per cent are full-time farmers. Most of the farms are below 1ha.

In the fruits sector, about four-fifth of the farms are less than 0.5ha and only 33 per cent are considered "commercial". As for vegetable farms, about 80 per cent of them are less than 2ha.

Generally, small-scale farms

are plagued with socio-economic and institutional problems such as poverty, ageing farmers, insecurity of land tenure, inadequate access to credit, markets and extension, and limited infrastructure.

Considering that the food production in 2050 will need to increase by 60 per cent due to increases in population and income, investment in food production is essential to achieve food security at all levels — increasing the availability of food on the market, helping to keep prices affordable, rewards for producers, and making food accessible to rural and urban consumers.



Food production will increase by 60 per cent in 2050 due to increases in population and income.

Investment in food and agriculture is also required to achieve sustainable food security and eliminate poverty, while at same time addressing climate issues, conserving natural resources and facilitating the transition to sustainable production systems.

The food sector, therefore, deserves special attention so that its resources are optimised. It must be developed and transformed into a modern, competitive and commercially vibrant sector. This can be achieved if the food sector emulates the industrial crop production model

where large plantations (which are private sector-led) co-exist with smallholders.

It would require changes in the agricultural policy to drive the private sector to invest and finance food production. This simply means private investment in agriculture will need to be scaled up to achieve sustainable food security.

The government would have to foster an "enabling environment" for the private sector to invest in food production. "Enabling environment" means investing in advisory services, productivity-enhancing research, supply chain

development, human resource development in entrepreneurship, and social safety net.

There must also be incentives for the private sector to get involved so that the return of investment is on par with industrial crops such as oil palm.

And this can be encouraged through appropriate domestic resource mobilisation initiatives and fiscal policies.

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