

# Producing more agripreneurs

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**Y**OUNG graduates who are interested in entrepreneurship should consider starting an agricultural business.

Even though they may face hurdles, such as a lack of business acumen, technical skills or access to working capital, this can be addressed by Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Agripreneur Incubation Programme.

Participant Nasuha Safirah Elias, 24, said the five-month course is filled with theories and practical know-how, and with an allowance provided, she did not face financial difficulties in starting her business.

"It also required us to run a business project and generate sales, which provided us with hands-on experience."

Since its inception in 2012, the programme has enabled graduates to gain extensive theoretical and practical entrepreneurship skills with a monthly allowance of RM1,000 and future funding opportunities.

Run by the university's Agriculture Faculty, it aims to produce excellent agripreneurs in line with national aspiration to increase the number of young entrepreneurs.

The programme is supported by the Education Ministry, AgroBank, the National Entrepreneur Group Economic Fund (Tekun Nasional) and the Young Agripreneur Unit of the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry.

UPM Agriculture Faculty dean Professor Dr Abdul Shukor Juraimi highlighted that it is the only university-run agripreneur development programme in the country.

"The Education Ministry has also recognised it as a high impact programme which has continued to achieve its targets.

"From 2012 to 2018, we recorded a total of 305 participants, of which 168 or 55 per cent have successfully become entrepreneurs. They have executed various agriculture production projects in their respective localities.

"In 2019, 29 graduates were selected to join this programme. The five-month programme ensured that the participants underwent comprehensive training and gained the right resources to become an entrepreneur.

"Participants were also trained to formulate a viable business plan, develop independence and learn technical knowledge according to their respective modules. Upon completion, they would be able to receive a special funding to pursue their projects," said Shukor.

To date, 14 companies have been set up by the programme participants.

"UPM is committed to continue this programme and we are looking into collaborating with the Youth and Sports Ministry to offer the same model to train young entrepreneurs," said Shukor.

Held for five to six months, the programme is open to all applicants aged 30 and below with a diploma as a minimum qualification.

Last year, the programme offered five modules of specialisation, namely crop planting (rockmelon fertigation); aquaculture (tilapia farming); hybrid free-range chicken farming; food management and service; and ruminant husbandry (cattle and sheep).

Nasuha, a food science and technology graduate, was determined to join the programme to grow her family business.

"My father owns a farm in Kedah, which is yet to be commercialised. I decided to take up ruminant husbandry to learn how to manage the farm and livestock, as well as its business.



(Second row) Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Board of Directors chairman Tan Sri Dr Ghauth Jasmon (eighth from right), UPM Agriculture Faculty dean Professor Dr Abdul Shukor Juraimi (seventh from right) and Programme coordinator and UPM Agriculture Faculty fellow Sahbani Saimin (fifth from right) at the 2019 UPM Agripreneur Incubation Programme closing ceremony.



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**PROFESSOR DR ABDUL SHUKOR JURAIMI**  
UPM Agriculture Faculty dean



Universiti Putra Malaysia Agripreneur Incubation Programme alumna and MZ Fertigasi Enterprise founder Mohd Zuhri Jusoh at his farm in Jerantut, Pahang.

"We learnt everything from grant application to marketing and business. On the practical side, we trained at a farm and learnt about animal anatomy, animal feed, waste management and handling of by-products."

For Muhammad Syahiran Hashim, 23, the programme has prepared him to start his own poultry business in Kelantan.

"Having graduated with a degree in agricultural business from UPM, I found this programme to have more in-depth focus in poultry breeding.

"It exposed me to the value chain from rearing, input supply until the product delivery," he said.

Muhammad Ashraf Ibrahim, 21, already has an agricultural project prior to enrolling in the rock melon fertigation module.

"I was involved in cucumber fertigation but I lacked the business management and marketing know-how. So, I took this opportunity to upskill. The experience enabled me to adopt a wider outlook in my agricultural business. I also learnt to market my produce in a commercial way.

"On the technical side, I learnt more about fertigation technology, which allows us to produce higher quality crops due to the accurate nutrient intake. It is automated, enabling us to save on labour. The water and fertiliser will be supplied to the plants by a set timer," said Ashraf.

UPM also collaborates with the programme's alumni to expand the present participants' practical experience.

A 2014 alumna and MZ Fertigasi Enterprise founder Mohd Zuhri Jusoh said confidence is a key take-away from the Agripreneur Incubation Programme.

"Confidence is an important characteristic.

When I first started out, I did not get a favourable response from the bank. But after joining this programme, I started believing in my abilities and show more commitment to the business."

For Zuhri, the programme is an excellent platform to gain a better understanding of entrepreneurship.

"It prepared us mentally and physically for the ups and downs of business. Many people have the interest, but they are not skilled enough. So you need to learn and gain more knowledge."

Post-programme, Zuhri secured a RM10,000 loan from Tekun Nasional.

"With what I have learnt, I knew how to prioritise and use the capital to grow my business. Two years ago, I bought a bigger farmland and my enterprise has expanded tremendously."

In his speech at the closing ceremony, UPM board of directors chairman Tan Sri Dr Ghauth Jasmon said: "The future of this country depends on agriculture. This is a very important programme for young entrepreneurs to create wealth and contribute to the development of the nation."

Programme coordinator and UPM Agriculture Faculty fellow Sahbani Saimin said more young graduates should enrol in this comprehensive programme.

"Looking at the market demands, we developed the syllabus in-house by drawing the expertise from the UPM Agriculture Faculty, Forestry Faculty and Food Science and Technology Faculty."

Aiming to increase the rate of successful entrepreneurs for this year's upcoming batch, Sahbani said the applications will be open beginning from Feb 3.