

UPM-Farm Fresh ICoE to enhance local dairy industry

RAYYAN RAFIDI
rayyan.rafidi@nstp.com.my

FOOD security is a growing issue faced by many countries and therefore, enhancing a nation's agricultural production is one way to meet local needs.

In Malaysia, one area the government is emphasising on is domestic dairy production.

Malaysia's self-sufficiency level (SSL) for fresh milk currently stands at 61 per cent. Through the 2017 National Dairy Industry Development Programme, the government aims to increase the SSL to 100 per cent in five years time.

In line with the national aspirations, a collaboration between Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Farm Fresh Sdn Bhd (Farm Fresh) hopes to strengthen the domestic dairy production capacity through the UPM-Farm Fresh Dairy Farming Industry Centre of Excellence (ICoE), which is set to open to the public next month.

Apart from the mission to elevate the nation's dairy industry, the 60ha facility located at UPM's Agricultural Park (UAP) in Serdang, Selangor, was slated to be a platform for academicians to increase research and development, as well as enhance the country's agriculture sector.

UPM vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Aini Ideris said the collaboration has helped immensely in developing the park, which included the construction and restoration of the farm infrastructure, maintaining UPM pastoral plots and acquiring animal feed at a lower price.

"As industry-level dairy farm managed with an edu-tourism approach, the centre hopes to instill an interest in the agriculture



(Front row, from left) Universiti Putra Malaysia vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Aini Ideris, UPM Board of Directors chairman Professor Tan Sri Dr Ghauth Jasmon and Farm Fresh operations director Azmi Zainal visiting the barn at the UPM-Farm Fresh Dairy Farming Industry Centre of Excellence (ICoE) soft launch.

field among the younger generation with UPM's agricultural expertise," said Aini at the ICoE soft launch on Dec 20.

UPM would also benefit from the revenue generated by the farm with a profit sharing ratio of 40:60 with Farm Fresh.

"UPM's name will be printed on each dairy product produced by the ICoE project, increasing the varsity's visibility and brand in the national food industry," said Aini.

"Apart from profit-sharing, this project is significant to enhance the dairy-related learning and research process including pasteurisation; livestock feeding and upkeep; milk handling and processing; product development and distribution of dairy products in a real modern production environment."

Equipped with a flower farm, chicken barn, petting zoo, koi fish pond, modern paddy farm and a fruit-picking farm, the centre will also serve as an agrotourism project.

"Through this package, visitors can experience the dairy farm and its various agrotourism elements as well as enjoy dairy and meat-based food products," she added.

Aini said students from UPM's Veterinary doctorate programmes and the Animal Science programme, are welcomed to undergo their practical training at the centre.

"The ICoE is also developing the smart farming system with the expertise of our Agriculture Faculty and UAP," said Aini.

The centre will also address issues like the high cost of imported animal feed for

livestock. "We cannot continue to rely on imported animal feed which is unsustainable in terms of the economy and food security. Efforts have been mobilised by universities and research institutes to resolve this issue but the public sector needs to work with the private sector to have a more efficient sharing of financial resources, expertise and technology transfer," said Aini.

Farm Fresh operations director Azmi Zainal said that the ICoE houses one of the nation's most sophisticated modern farms.

"Building the centre with a RM12 million budget, we utilise the Tunnel Barn technology developed by UPM which ensures a more relaxed and healthy livestock."

With 418 cattle, the farm is the largest in Selangor in terms of production.

Azmi said: "Of the total, 318 are dairy cows which produce 2500 litres of milk per day with a daily production rate of 15 litres per cow."

"With this launch, we hope to increase the production rate and become the reference point for the dairy industry. Students can now gain industrial experience of the dairy value chain within the university's walls, he added.

"We also want to showcase modern farming technologies in our Tunnel Barn system and paddy cultivation. Hopefully, this initiative will make the younger generation be more inclined towards agriculture," said Azmi.

The industry-academia collaboration between UPM and Farm Fresh began in 2017, when a memorandum of agreement was inked between UPM and the latter's holding company, The Holstein Milk Company Sdn Bhd.

