

Modern farming to boost agriculture in Iskandar M'sia

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

Kulai, Pasir Gudang and Pontian identified for project to help farmers, reduce dependency on food imports

PLANS are in the pipeline to venture into modern farming in Malaysia's first economic corridor.

Iskandar Regional Development Authority (Irda) chief executive officer Datuk Ismail Ibrahim said three locations had been identified, namely Kulai, Pasir Gudang and Pontian where modern farming could take place.

He said Irda would work closely with relevant agencies and parties to develop and promote modern agriculture activities in Iskandar Malaysia.

Ismail said these included the Agriculture Ministry, Johor Agriculture Department and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), as well as experts in the modern farming sector.

"We are looking at launching the modern farming project either by the end of this year or in the first quarter of next year," he said, adding that Irda hoped to emulate the success stories of The Netherlands, South Korea and Japan in developing modern agriculture activities.

The Netherlands is the world

leader in agricultural innovation, thanks to its use of technology and knowledge. Despite its small size (42,508sq km), the country is the world's second largest food exporter after the United States, as measured by value.

Ismail said instead of requiring a large tract of land, the vertical farming method would be used in Iskandar Malaysia.

"The way forward for us is to modernise farming activities in Iskandar Malaysia to bring high yield and better returns to our farmers and reduce our dependence on food imports," said Ismail.

He added that initially, the modern farming project would focus on vegetables with shorter growing cycles and high demand such as cucumber, tomatoes, lettuce and rock melon.

Ismail said modern farming could be the new sector in Iskandar Malaysia from the existing nine promoted sectors which include food and agro-based products.

He added that Irda was open to domestic and foreign investors, government-linked companies and state-linked companies to invest in the farming project.

He said another option, in developing modern farming, was to engage with existing smallholders to form a consortium to produce products for the domestic and export markets.

He said Irda and the Agriculture Ministry were keen to attract and encourage youths, including those in the urban areas and young entrepreneurs to take up modern farming.

Going forward, he said it would be logical for Irda to venture into growing crops for animal feed once the modern farming project was successful, as well as poultry breeding and animal husbandry.

He said the agriculture sector — regardless of the conventional or modern farming methods — remained relevant in the economic corridor for food security and to reduce currency outflow on



Ismail says Irda wants to develop and promote modern farming activities to reduce dependency on food imports.

imported food.

"We want to take a lead in modern farming techniques not only in the country but also in the Asean region," said Ismail.