

'POULTRY INDUSTRY NEEDS OVERHAUL'

Help breeders transition to more modern farming system, says expert

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THE country's broiler industry needs a radical transformation to tackle the rising prices of chicken and related supply chain issues, experts suggest.

Quick-fix solutions, including importing frozen birds at a lower price, are temporary in nature and do little to ensure the industry's sustainability, they said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Plantation Studies Institute director Professor Shaufique F. Sidique said long-term plans were needed to address the rising prices of chicken, adding that tackling the cost of animal feed by encouraging grain corn farming was only one aspect of it.

"If we have a lot of money to spend, it is better to use it directly for the poultry industry rather than spending it on corn farming, which itself will be very costly.

"What we need is an overall review of the poultry ecosystem. One of them is to look at chicken farms in Malaysia that are still using the open farming system."

He said the closed-house system could increase productivity by improving the feed conversion ratio and reduce mortality, as well as curb the spread of diseases.

"The closed-house system allows farmers to ensure a healthier environment by, among other things, protecting chicken from harsh weather conditions and illnesses that could affect productivity."

He said more efforts should be put into helping chicken farmers transition to a more modern farming system that many were still reluctant to adopt due to costs. This aid could come in the form of incentives and funds.

The time-consuming and costly process of obtaining planning permission for farms should also be reviewed, said Shaufique, a professor of agricultural and resource economics.



Addressing the cost of animal feed is only one aspect of dealing with the rising prices of chicken. FILE PIC

At the same time, he said, businesses should be encouraged to invest in better facilities and technology by having gazetted areas for poultry farming and permanent land tenure to provide certainty in long-term operational sustainability.

"Higher operating standards should be put in place for slaughter facilities. On-site slaughtering should be banned as it poses hygiene, food safety, environmental and health-related issues.

"When we have high standards and the industry is well-regulated, it will be more attractive to investors. Thailand did this 10 years ago, which included using modern farming methods to boost chicken meat production."

The government should also consider tax and financial incentives to encourage foreign direct investments and domestic investments in the production of value-added products, such as processed products and ready-to-eat meals for export, he said, which could reduce exports of live birds.

"Exporting dressed birds and processed products creates more value. Tax imposed on live broiler exports could be a bane, so promote the development of value-adding activities instead."

He said the Agriculture and Food Industries Ministry's Veterinary Services Department had formulated a comprehensive

plan on broiler farming that could improve the sector.

Separately, Consumers Association of Penang president Mohideen Abdul Kader called on the authorities to step up enforcement and station more officers at wet markets to monitor the prices.

He also urged consumers to avoid purchasing poultry products if they were sold higher than the fixed price.

"Boycott buying (expensive) chicken. Go for other items. There are already complaints that chicken sellers impose an additional charge on consumers if they ask to have the chicken cut into pieces, following the ceiling price set by the government."

He said some sellers charged RM1 for the service, while others charged RM2 to clean the chicken.

Some traders also complained that they were not making any profit because of the low commission they received for the chicken, he said.

He said chicken breeders had informed CAP that animal feed that was

mostly imported was very expensive, one of the factors in the rising prices of chicken.

"CAP is calling on the government to produce chicken feed locally.

"Traders are not making money and those raking profits are wholesalers and middlemen."



Professor Shaufique F. Sidique



Mohideen Abdul Kader