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1.	AGRICULTURE: THE NEXT ENGINE OF GROWTH, CORPORATE NEWS, THE MALAYSIAN RESERVE -9	LAIN-LAIN
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UKK MAFS

UNIT KOMUNIKASI KORPORAT
KEMENTERIAN PERTANIAN DAN KETERJAMINAN MAKANAN
(UNTUK EDARAN DALAMAN MAFS, JABATAN DAN AGENSI SAHAJA)

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Agriculture: The next engine of growth.

Food security experts say the country needs to adopt best practices of countries such as Finland, Ireland and Norway that have been performing well

by AKMAR ANNUAR

AN ESTIMATED 840 million of the world's population will face food insecurity by 2030 if the issue is not addressed immediately, according to the United Nations.

This is especially urgent with the increase in climate change and global population as well as supply chain disruptions such as those experienced during the pandemic.

Hence, food security has become a top priority in many countries as of late.

In Malaysia, the Agriculture and Food Security Ministry (MAFS) said the food security situation is still good, but the country needs to address some disruptions caused by geopolitical tensions that have impacted poultry supply.

Currently, Malaysia is ranked 41st at the global level for Global Food Security Index (GFSI) with a score of 69.9, 10th in the Asia-Pacific region and second after Singapore (73.1) in the Asean region.

However, MAFS emphasised that a country's food security should not be measured competitively.

"There are differences in need and demand for food according to diet trends and preferences, also the economic background is a contributing factor that makes a country ranked better," MAFS told *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)* recently.

For Malaysia to improve its rank in the GFSI, food security experts are saying that the country needs to adopt best practices of countries such as Finland, Ireland and Norway that have been performing well.

According to GFSI, these three countries have the highest score in all four categories that were in line with food security dimensions.

MAFS said the Finnish food



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system is resource-efficient and waste-free and the country pioneers and runs pilots on research, innovations and new operating methods that aim for a sustainable food system.

Similarly, Ireland is promoting a sustainable food system approach in its policies, especially in agriculture.

This comes with Ireland's efforts to encourage and facilitate knowledge transfer and investment to support innovation in the agro-food sector and in scaling up the production of climate-resilient and nutritious foods.

In line with GFSI's vision, Norway also places food security as a top priority with US\$300 million (RM1.28 billion) in grants allocated for food security initiatives in 2022.

Norway works towards strengthening local and regional value chains and adaptation of food production to climate change.

MAFS observed that tackling food waste is also an agenda towards creating a sustainable food system.

Similarly, Singapore manages to secure food supply through imports while maintaining its nutritional and food safety standards.

On another note, MAFS Minister Mohamad Sabu shared that there is a misconception in terms of GFSI

understanding of the ability of a country to provide a better situation of food to the people based on the state of the agriculture development there.

"This is because the index of GFSI is the accumulation of various factors and affordability of Singapore is better than Malaysia, because Singapore's per capita income is better than Malaysia, thus enabling them to have more purchasing power than Malaysians," he said in a recent statement.

Besides, he added that the Singapore government adopts open trade to food and agriculture products which enable importers to import the best and most affordable food or agriculture products driven by markets.

The other aspect, of why the next-door country fared better than Malaysia in GFSI, is in terms of research and development (R&D) where Malaysia scores 48.7 for agricultural research and development expenditure, while Singapore scores 83.2.

Despite the challenges, Malaysia is still ranked in the top 10 best positions in Asia Pacific and second best in Asean in food security based on the GFSI index.

MAFS disclosed that the agriculture sector only contributed 7.1% of the total GDP in 2021 with

an average share of 7.5% for the period from 2015 to 2021.

Based on the report, the sector seemingly became a less powerful engine of Malaysia's economic growth.

Regardless, MAFS still believed that agriculture plays an important role as a food provider, job creator and generates income from export products and as an input to other industries.

Meanwhile, understanding R&D plays a crucial role in the sector. The government acknowledges the importance of forging strong partnerships between research organisations and industry.

In the ministry's National Agro-food Policy 2021-2030 (DAN2.0), two strategies under the Policy Thrust embrace modernisation and smart agriculture.

Reflecting on those strategies, MAFS intends to intensify research, development, commercialisation and innovation (RDCl) in catalysing modernisation of the agro-food sector by increasing both fiscal and non-fiscal resources for research activities.

"We need to look into reducing the time taken for intellectual property certification processes and intensifying international knowledge exchanges," MAFS said.

It will also invest in more inno-

vation programmes and activities to support the advancement of agro-tech by strengthening the link between basic research output with industrial application to increase the rate of contribution by RDCl towards modernisation of the agro-food subsector.

"Some of the programmes are also offering incentives in terms of tax deductions through the application of local innovations," it said.

Furthermore, these incentives on RDCl are currently being implemented in government agencies or government-linked companies such as the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (Mida), Malaysia Research Accelerator for Technology and Innovation (MRanti), Malaysian Technology Development Corp Sdn Bhd (MTDC) and Cradle Fund Sdn Bhd.

MAFS said moving forward, the improvement of the GFSI needs to focus on investment in R&D to increase the country's productivity and reduce food production costs through modernisation and technology.

Applauding the government's support and incentives for the sector, Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi) DG Datuk Dr Mohamad Zabawi Abdul Ghani noted that the agricultural sector continues to be one of the most important growth engines for the national economy.

In the recent development, Mardi has collaborated with Tehran's Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organisation to enhance bilateral cooperation in agriculture, especially in the field of research and development.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Pineapple Industry Board (MPIB) expressed its excitement with the RM9 million allocation from the Johor government, hoping this will realise the board's night farming plan to increase pineapple exports from 400,000 to 700,000 tonnes a year by 2025.

Hence, MPIB plans to extend night farming for the MD2 pineapples as these are sought after for export, especially to the Middle East and Europe.

Headline	Cultivating urban farming in Malaysia		
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Urban farming is able to reduce food miles which are responsible for 3b tonnes of carbon emissions annually if measured on a global scale

by AZALEA AZUAR

CITY dwellers have been growing fresh produce like fruits and vegetables in vacant lots, rooftops and abandoned indoor spaces since the World War II era.

During that period, millions of Americans practised urban farming, which they called "victory gardens" in their backyards to produce additional fruits and vegetables.

The then-US government also introduced meatless and wheatless days to cut consumption to combat rising food prices during the war.

These farms managed to produce 40% of the crops nationwide.

After the war, the food culture in the city and suburbs declined and was replaced by large monocultural factory farms which developed in the countryside.

In Europe, pre-war crop failures and previous dependence on imported food led to serious food shortages.

Therefore, urban farming was adopted in order to feed Allied troops.

Fast forward to current times, Covid-19 has raised the popularity of urban farming after it caused severe food supply issues due to the Movement Control Order (MCO).

According to a report by researchers from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), the distribution of locally produced fresh food and imported food were disrupted in several urban communities.

"The situation was especially bad during the implementation of the first MCO where — due to movement restrictions — fresh food supplies such as vegetables from local production areas ended up being dumped and never reached the intended local consumers," it said.

Besides allowing consumers to take the issue into their own hands, urban farming was able to reduce food miles which are responsible for three billion tonnes of carbon emissions annually if measured on a global scale.

It could also enhance local ecosystems which attracts pollinators while providing more green spaces to help reduce the heat in urban areas.

Green Fingers Aquaponics Farm CEO and founder Charles Lai noted that during the pandemic, the Klang Valley suffered a shortage of vegetables because most of the supplies were brought from Cameron Highlands, Pahang, and imported from overseas.

"There were also transportation issues which led to the increase in vegetable prices," he told *The Malaysian Reserve* (TMR).

Besides supply issues, Lai said people also had more extra time while being confined to their homes during the MCOs.

Wanting something productive to do during the lockdown, Lai noticed that more Malaysians ventured into agriculture.

Challenges in Urban Farming
Despite its many benefits, urban farming poses some environmental issues where pesticides used in the city may cause air pollution,



especially in areas with dense populations, and affect those with severe respiratory problems.

Fertilisers and pesticides will also contaminate the water supply.

"It is important that the use of these methods is reduced in urban areas and monitored by the local authorities," Lai said.

Moreover, the overuse of public water supply by these urban farms could cause water shortages in the city therefore, they would need to utilise treated wastewater.

Urban farms also often lacked manpower as most skilled and experienced agricultural workers preferred to live away from the cities.

Therefore, for urban farms to work, people had to be educated and supervised, which was very time-consuming, expensive and not on the top of local governments' priority list at the time.

Meanwhile, metropolitan cities have been heavily polluted which in turn harms crop production.

In Malaysia, there is insufficient land for urban farming and not enough support for urban farmers as well as limited resources and education.

Although starting an urban farm may be easy, Lai advised that one needs to build it to a certain scale in order to make it economical.

"If you do it small, your overhead costs will be high and then your sales will be low," he said, adding that it is a matter of consistency and quantity.

Lai hoped that the current government could support and fund city dwellers who want to build their own farms.

He noted that the previous government was looking to encourage more youths into urban farming.

The previous Youth and Sports (KBS) Ministry, Agriculture and Food Industry Ministry (MaFi), as well as the federal Department of Lands and Mines (JKPTG), have formed a strategic partnership to achieve the target.

So far, a total of 8,000 young entrepreneurs have received assistance including grants, funding, as well as short-term courses and technical and financial advisory services.

Fresh Delivery from Farm to Home

Located in Semenyih, Selangor, Green Fingers is an urban farm which uses an aquaponics system to produce vegetables.

An approximately 50-minute drive from Kuala Lumpur, Lai opened the farm to provide healthy and fresh vegetables to the city folk.

"We harvest our vegetables usually in the morning and deliver them straight to the customers in the afternoon.

"At the moment we serve retailers, restaurants and directly to end users," he told TMR.

Currently, without its own market, Green Fingers provides the produce to fresh markets such as Bilalila Mart and Ola Mart.

Green Fingers also does e-commerce delivery which customers can order through <https://greenfingers.orderla.my/greenfingers/2744> and they will deliver it straight to their homes.



According to Lai, the cost of setting up a do-it-yourself aquaponics farm can range from RM5,000 to RM10,000 depending on the size. PH: BY MAJLIZ ANON NABAHAD

Advantages of Urban Farming

- Weatherproof**
Crops grown in controlled environment
- Year-round crop production**
No more "seasonal crops" — continuous production
- Environment-friendly**
Indoor growing conditions eliminate the use of chemical pesticides
- No running out of land**
No soil or new land
- Increased yield**
Produces the same yield as a traditional 4-5 acre farm
- Water conservation**
Hydroponics uses 70% less water

Source: The Asian Post, May 2021