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Do more research on sago, says CM

KOTA SAMARAHAN: More research should be done on sago as it has potential to become important additional source of food material of the future, Chief Minister Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud stressed, adding that production of the crop should also be intensified.

The Chief Minister said the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) before had made forecast that the world would face food-shortage in future if efforts were not made to prevent it from happening.

He said the competition among materials which before were specially allocated for foods were used as materials for biodiesel.

"Because of this it is important for us to carry out research to increase the basic resources that add to the supply of food resources for the people," he said in his address at the opening of the Second ASEAN Sago Symposium 2012 at UNIMAS here yesterday.

The symposium with the theme "Advances in Sago research and development" was hosted by UNIMAS with the co-organisers including CRAUN Research Sdn Bhd, Bogor Agriculture University (IPB), Indonesia and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Regional of Asia Pacific (FAORAP), Thailand.

According to Taib, sago was widely used as staple food by people in certain areas in Sarawak and Indonesia in the past, but now it is the subject of intense studies as the main option for starch source of the future.

"Research in sago is something that is still very new compared to other commodities but I believe it is going to be more important in future," he said, adding that sago is being looked as a crop that Sarawak ought to pay greater attention to.

"For that reason we in Sarawak have looked at sago as a crop that we ought to pay greater attention to. We are trying to see whether or not we could increase the size of sago plantation in Sarawak, particularly in the Melanau area and in the 2nd division area," he said.

"But I do believe that for all the excitement that we have in the areas of research of sago, I think we cannot leave untouched basic questions of how to increase and make sago production more scientific and of course, more cost efficient from the point of view of production, and that is what we ought to slowly go into from now on, he said.

"I would like to recommend within that context of Sarawak, and with the experience that we have in Sarawak, there is a case for us to look at into the growing of sago in a much more scientific manner," he said.

"Right from the beginning of building with the best of sago we can produce most. I think there is a species in Papua New Guinea that probably can be used in the research and we can see that the cloning can be done in a much successful way without much problem.

How to get better productivity from our neighbour ought to be tackled in a much more scientific manner, he said, adding that certain soil that are now not productive can be converted for the planting of sago and sago area in Sarawak can be doubled in Saratok and Melanau areas.

"I like to urge you to start as early as possible into that area of research which can enable us to produce sago much more," he pointed out.

Taib said the sago research centre in Mukah should be looked into and see what we can do to increase. Also while research are on, method of improving labour and productivity in the sago industry should be looked into because we cannot rely on the existing trend of labour because people are going away from it and we ought to encourage people including the industrial players where the labour and method of planting and harvesting of sago could be improved, he said.

Sarawak produced more than 90 per cent of the sago starch in Malaysia and it is one of the most important commodities to the state with an annual export of around 60,000 to 70,000 tonnes, with a total revenues exceeding USD10 million annually.

UNIMAS' vice chancellor Professor Datuk D r Khairuddin Ab Hamid said the symposium attracted 120 participants comprising academicians, researchers and professionals from the industry.

He said UNIMAS is striving to embark on serious research and the symposium is an important agenda. He hoped through the symposium, UNIMAS could initiate strong partnership. He encouraged local researchers to look at the possibility of communicating and engaging with the

local community in order to start thorough research of sago so that in the long run research can be sustainable.

Khairuddin also thanked the state government for providing 100 acres of land in Mukah for its research centre. He said one of the main areas UNIMAS will embark on is into sago research.

Source : Sarawak Tribune