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Malaysia has potential to be region's herbal hub

MALAYSIA has the potential to be a herbal hub in Asia-Pacific through the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) initiative, the ECER Secretariat said.

The ECER aims to raise its herbs production by sixfold to 625,000 tonnes by 2020, at an estimated value of RM1.87 billion.

In 2005, it produced 80,560 tonnes worth RM201 million, the secretariat said in a statement yesterday.

The total area of cultivation land should also rise from 2,014ha to 10,000ha in the same period.

To spur the industry's growth, the ECER masterplan had identified four areas as herbal parks for cultivation, processing and manufacturing purposes.

They include the Herbal and Biotech Product Park in Gua



SAKINAH: There is a great return on investment.

Musang, a satellite farm in Jeli, a herbal park in Lanchang by Felda, a herbal garden in Raub by Technology Park Malaysia and a herbal park in Dungun by Ketengah.

The herbal park in Gua Musang, covering 1,000ha, is the largest in the region.

Under the herbal parks, a nucleus farm will be set up with participation of anchor companies. An integrated supply chain from seed to market will also be developed.

According to the Malaysian Agriculture Research and Development Institute (Mardi), the herbal and biotechnology industry should be worth about RM2.5 billion by 2010, from RM100 million in 2000 and RM500 million in 2005.

Japan, the US and Europe are emerging markets for herbal and biotechnology products.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia deputy director-general Dr Abdul Rashid Ab Malik said the local market for herbal products is now worth RM5 billion and about RM300 billion globally.

The figure is expected to grow 15 per cent annually, he added.

Herbal Asia chief executive officer Sakinah Yaakob said due to the potential of herbs in curing diseases and maintaining good health, there is a great return on investment.

"Continuing efforts are needed to develop the herbal industry in the country," she said in the statement.

"This is done not merely to produce herbal products but also to promote biological heritage products. We would like to see herbal products as icon of Malaysia to attract tourists," Sakinah added.