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Minister: Herbal industry can be lucrative for rural people

SIMUNJAN: The herbal industry can be a cash cow for rural folks through the opening up of various sources of income due to the high world demand.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas said the commercial value of the herbal sector was expected to increase by three folds from RM777bil in 2009 to more than RM2tril by 2020.

According to him the domestic herbal market is expected to increase by 15% a year from RM7bil in 2010 to an estimated RM29bil by 2020.

Other than being used to produce pharmaceutical products, herbs can also be used to produce health supplements which can generate good income.

"The market value of the food and beverage industry in the country is estimated at RM30bil and the health food industry is expected to generate lucrative income," he said when launching an interactive herbal workshop here yesterday.

The Government, he said, had identified 11 forest species with medicinal value which were all available in the state under its National Key Economic Areas (NKEA).

Thus with more than 2,000 forest species in the country with identified medicinal value, herbs are now a non-wood based produce with vast potential which can contribute to the nation's economy.

Sixty five percent of the raw herbs in the country are, however, imported from China, India and Indonesia with the remaining 35% produced in the country.

"The Government, therefore, has introduced various initiatives under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) to add value to our export while reducing the import for the herbal based products," he said.

He added that it was important to encourage the rural folks to be interested in the herbal industry through interactive herbal workshops where they could be exposed to commercial opportunities.

Malaysian Forest Research and Development Board (MFRDB) chairman Nancy Shukri said only five percent of the RM10bil worth of the herbal industry in the country were local products which therefore created ample opportunities in the industry.

She said coupled with traditional knowledge, the value of herbal products could be enhanced and become priceless.

She pointed out that four of the six laboratories in the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) with Bionexus status were under its natural products division.

To ensure the sustainability of these natural products, farming and cultured tissue researches were carried out to benefit farmers who participated in the industry.



Only in Sarawak: Trader Cha Sailee from Kg Sungai Ba showing samples of her traditionally prepared herbs during the launch of the interactive herb workshop in Simunjan.