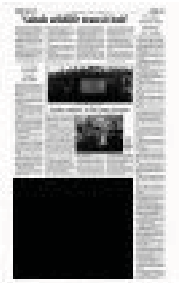


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Laid-back village may churn out millionaire entrepreneurs

TANGKAK: Located at the foothills of Gunung Ledang, here, Kampung Sagil seems to exude the typically laid-back atmosphere of traditional villages.

However, appearances can be deceiving. A composite of smaller villages – namely Kampung Parit 1, Parit 2, Parit 3, Conggo, Kurnia Jaya and Melayu Raya – Kampung Sagil has a population of about 3,000.

Far from being laid-back, the local villagers are an industrious and enterprising lot; many of them are involved in small-and medium-sized enterprises and run their own food processing businesses, motor workshops, retail outlets and transport services companies.

Another new business opportunity, with the potential to create a handful of millionaires among them, has now been presented to them and it involves the large-scale planting of certain herbal species that have immense commercial value.

Last month, a “model village herbal plot” pilot project was implemented in Kampung Sagil by the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), in collaboration with the Kampung Sagil Petty Traders Association (PPKS).

The project entails the planting of selected species of commercially viable herbs on a 0.7-hectare plot, which will serve as a long-term study site for FRIM to conduct research on the herbs concerned, namely drumstick (*Moringa oleifera*), cucur atap (*Baekkea frutescens*), senduduk putih (*Melastoma decemfidum*), belalai gajah (*Clivacinanthus nutans*), mengkudu (*Morinda citrifolia*), hempedu bumi (*Andrographis paniculata*), misai kucing (*Orthosiphon stamineus*), sambung nyawa (*Gynura procumbens*) and pecah beling (*Strobilanthes crispus*).

The model plot will also serve as a “Herbal Plantation Reference Plot”, not only for FRIM researchers and university students but also for the Kampung Sagil residents, who will gain the know-how of growing the herbs. Once they have the expertise, they can embark on their own



A colourful welcome to the industrious village.

herbal plantations, which have the potential to yield lucrative returns over the long term.

According to FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latiff Mohmod, there is a high demand for herbal raw materials and products in this country.

He said the annual demand for herbal raw materials was estimated at 500 tonnes but currently, local suppliers could only provide about 80 tonnes.

In a survey on the usage of herbal products in Peninsular Malaysia conducted by FRIM in 2016, 73 per cent of the respondents said they used herbal-based perfumes, cosmetics, toiletries and nutritional products.

“This is clear proof that there is an upward trend in the demand for herbal products,” Abd Latiff said, here, at the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between FRIM and PPKS on Oct 14 pertaining to their collaboration to develop the model herbal plot at Kampung Sagil.

By exposing the villagers to the proper planting techniques and encouraging them to commercialise the cultivation of

herbs, FRIM hopes to reduce, and eventually eradicate, the environmentally unfriendly practice of foraging forests for herbs.

According to a study carried out by FRIM this year, 83 per cent of the Kacip Fatimah herb, which is known for its aphrodisiac qualities, sold locally is procured from forests.

“Our country cannot continue to depend on unsustainable means to get its supply of Kacip Fatimah,” Abd Latiff pointed out, adding that only 17 per cent of the herb currently available in the market was procured from commercial plantations.

He also hoped that Kampung Sagil’s model herbal plot would germinate large-scale cultivation as only herbal plantations could ensure a steady and continuous supply of various herbs to the domestic market and thus, reduce Malaysia’s dependency on imports.

Currently, about 87 per cent of herbal raw materials were imported from China, he added.

In 2016, Malaysia’s herbal exports were valued at less than USD10 million (RM42.28 million) while its imports exceeded USD70 million (RM296.02 million).

On why Kampung Sagil was selected as the site for the model herbal plot, Abd Latiff said FRIM had been collaborating with PPKS since last year on a project involving the planting of Kacip Fatimah that was funded by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) under its MOSTI Social Innovation initiative.

“It (model herbal plot project) is a continuation of our earlier collaboration (with PPKS),” he said, adding that Kampung Sagil has the potential to become a leading supplier of herbs in Malaysia from the next decade onwards.

Deputy Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Dr Hamim Samuri, who was also present at the MoU signing ceremony in Kampung Sagil, urged the villagers to make use of the opportunity pre-

sented to them through the model herbal plot project as they stood to earn a good income in the near future.

“They shouldn’t let go of this opportunity as the herbs have export potential. We also have companies locally that are willing to buy our herbs. However, they (Kampung Sagil residents) have to be committed and hardworking,” he said, adding that the model herbal plot would also attract visitors from all over the country due to its uniqueness.

Kampung Sagil residents who are involved in the model herbal plot project can expect to earn about RM1,000 to RM2,000 a month after the herbs are harvested.

When they embark on large-scale planting of the herbs, they can expect to earn a lucrative income over the long-term in view of the good market for herbal products, said PPKS president Datuk Md Ismail Hamdan.

He said for a start 10 members of PPKS would be involved in the pilot model herbal plot project.

“If utilised well, this platform can help to elevate the economic status of the local community.

“If eventually, we go into developing herbal plantations and manage them well, I won’t be too surprised if some of our kampung residents turn out to become millionaires in five or six years’ time. But we have to work hard at first,” he said.

Md Ismail said 10 PPKS members were also currently involved in the large-scale planting of Kacip Fatimah (a project funded by Mosti) and were expecting their first harvest next April.

Each hectare will yield an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 kilogrammes of Kacip Fatimah and fetch returns of almost RM100,000.

Vegetable farmer and rubber smallholder Saharudin Basir, 42, who is participating in both the model herbal plot and Kacip Fatimah projects, said the good demand for herbs had pushed him to try his hand at cultivating them. – Bernama