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## News

# Reaping the herbal harvest

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Dr Hamim (left) with Abd Latif (second from left) and Md Ismail (second from right) signing a plaque during the event. — Bernama

# Reaping the herbal harvest

FRIM collaborates with villagers to harness commercial value of crops

**TANGKAK:** Located at the foothills of Gunung Ledang, here, Kampung Sagil is not your typical laid-back traditional village.

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.

The 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 service companies.

Another new business opportunity 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 0.7ha 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 (*baeckaea frutescens*), senduduk putih (*melastoma decemfidum*), belalai gajah (*cincaecanthus nitens*), mengkudu (*morinda citrifolia*), hempedu bumi (*andropogon paniculata*), misal kucing (*orthosiphon stamineus*), sambung nyawa (*gynura procumbens*) and pecah beling (*strobilanthes crispus*).

It will also serve as a herbal plantation reference plot, not only for FRIM researchers and university students but also for Kampung Sagil residents, who will learn how to grow the herbs.

Once they have the expertise, they can embark on their own herbal plantations, which have the potential to yield lucrative returns over the long term.

FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latiff Mohmod said 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% of respondents said they used herbal-based perfumes, cosmetics, toiletries and nutritional products.

"This is proof that there is demand for herbal products," Abd Latiff said at the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU)



Kaci fatimah samplings planted under the model village herbal plot at Kampung Sagil.



Hamim (second from right) listening to Abd Latiff (third from right) with other officers during the launch.

between FRIM and PPKS.

By exposing the villagers to 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% of the *kaci fatimah* herb sold locally is procured from forests.

"Our country cannot continue to depend on unsustainable means to get its supply of *kaci fatimah*," Abd Latiff pointed out.

He hoped the Kampung Sagil model herbal plot would germinate large-scale cultivation as only herbal plantations could ensure a steady and continuous supply of various herbs and reduce

Malaysia's dependence on imports.

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 *kaci fatimah* that was funded by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (Mosti) under its social innovation initiative.

Deputy Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Dr Hamim Samuri, who was also present at the MoU signing ceremony in Kampung Sagil, said there are local companies willing to buy the herbs.

He added the model herbal plot would also attract visitors from all over the country.

Kampung Sagil residents who are involved in the model herbal

plot project can expect to earn about RM1,000 to RM2,000 a month.

PPKS president Datuk Md Ismail Hamdan said those who choose to embark on large-scale planting would earn a lucrative income.

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

Ten PPKS members are also currently involved in the large-scale planting of *kaci fatimah* and expecting their first harvest next April.

Each hectare will yield an estimated 2,000kg to 5,000kg of *kaci fatimah*.

Vegetable farmer and rubber smallholder Saharudin Basir, 42, who is participating in both the model herbal plot and *kaci fatimah* projects, said the good demand for herbs had encouraged him to take part.

"I know there's a ready market for various kinds of herbs, so that's why I'm not afraid to participate in these projects," said Saharudin.

He has planted *kaci fatimah* on a 0.2ha plot in his rubber smallholding and only uses organic farming methods.

"I only use organic fertiliser and to keep the pests away, I use a mixture comprising garlic, lemongrass and small chillies which I spray onto the plants."

Mohd Zai Kamarudin, 42, said the good prospects in the herbal industry had attracted him to participate.

"By taking part in these projects, I know I can generate a higher income," he said. — Bernama