KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 15 hectares has been identified to be turned into bamboo plantations for the supply of panda food.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) director-general Datuk Dr. Abel Latif Mohmod said 5ha in Putrajaya and 10ha in Paya Indah Wetlands will be cultivated with four types of bamboo suitable for the consumption of pandas: "The four types of bamboo are Dendrocalamus asper (buluh botol), Thysostachys siamensis (buluh siam) and Rambusa glutinosae (buluh pagar)," he said. "These bamboo species are commonly found here. We wanted to create the plantations as it would be most feasible in the long run."

He said the two locations were selected on the basis of rotation, so that one area would be able to provide supplies if the other fell short. Abd Latiff said all four types of bamboo are easily found because they are commercially cultivated. People also plant them for ornamental use," he said. "Pandas only consume the small leaves and branches of bamboo as well as fruits such as apples and carrots."

Abd Latiff said the pandas' surrounding areas will also be enhanced with bamboo plants to simulate its natural habitat. It was recently announced that the Chinese government will loan two pandas to the Malaysian government, in commemoration of diplomatic relations between both nations which reaches its 40th anniversary in 2014. The loan will cost the Malaysian government RM20 million.

Animal conservation groups have criticised the move, saying the allocation should be used for the conservation of other endangered species in the country.