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 hill-top traditional village.

A composite of smaller villages, namely Kampung Parit 1, Parit 2, Puti S Korog, Dainia Jaya and Motor Bys, Kampung Sagil has a population of about 5,000.

The villagers are in an impoverished and struggling lot, many of them are involved in small and medium-scale agriculture, crop farming, and small food processing businesses, fruit workshops, small stores, and transport service companies.

Another new business opportunity involves the large-scale planting of certain herbal species that have immensely commercial value.

Last month, a “model village herbal plot” pilot project was implemented in Kampung Sagil by the forensic research institute Malayan O/RM, in collaboration with the Kampung Sagil petty traders association.

The project entails the planting of selected species of commercially viable herbs on a 0.7ha plot, which would serve as a long-term study site for FRIM to conduct research on the herbs concerned, namely aromatic (e.g. turmeric, cumin, laurel, cinnamon), edible fruits (e.g. bananas, mangoes), ornamental (e.g. ornamental shrubs, hibiscus, ornamental periwinkle), medicinal (e.g. camphor), and small chillies which I spray with organic fertiliser and pesticides, and also serve as a herbal plantation reference site, not only for FRIM researchers and university students but also for Kampung Sagil residents, who will learn new methods to cut their cost.

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’s forensic director Datuk斑 Abdullah Mohd Mohd said annual demand for herbal raw materials was estimated at 500 tonnes but currently, local suppliers could only provide about 30 tonnes.

In a survey on the usage of herbal products in peninsular Malaysia conducted by FRIM this year, 73% of respondents said they used herbal-based products, 45% of whom were female, and 38% of whom were aged between 20 and 39 years.

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

PPKS members are also currently involved in the large-scale planting of Andy batik and expecting their first harvest next April.

Each hectare will yield an estimated 200kg to 500kg of leafy plant.

Vegetable farmer and rubber smallholder Saharudin, 42, who is participating in both the model herbal plot and leafy plant projects, said the good prospects in the herbal market had encouraged him to take part.

He hopes the model herbal plot can attract visitors from all walks of life.

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