

Sabah to produce 35,000 tonnes seaweed

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By Nancy Lai

KOTA KINABALU: As the country's only seaweed producer, Sabah will be the focus of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry's program to further boost and develop the seaweed farming industry.

According to its Deputy Minister, Datuk Wira Mohd Johari Baharom, the ministry is looking at increasing the current seaweed production in the state to 35,000 metric tonnes this year.

"We hope to be able to achieve this with the participation of 11 companies in the Seaweed Mini-Estate Project in Sabah," he said at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony here yesterday.

He pointed out that apart from doubling the production, the companies' participation is aimed at improving and raising the methods of producing seaweed for which demand has been growing.

"In 2010, 100 per cent of the country's seaweed production came from Sabah which recorded 20,789 metric tonnes of dry seaweed valued at RM62.35 million. The production increased by 15 per cent to 23,94 metric tonnes in 2011 which were valued at RM66.2 million.

"With the latest method used by

these 11 companies, it is possible for us to achieve an even higher production, about 35,000 metric tonnes this year," he said during a press conference after the signing ceremony.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been appointed as the Government's representative in this venture, he said adding that the development of the seaweed industry and its down-stream products is very dynamic and is capable of giving a huge contribution to the country's Gross National Income (GNI).

The companies participating in the project in Semporna are Avanova Group Sdn Bhd, Madesjaya Sdn Bhd, NIZH Goodwill Sdn Bhd, Perdana Seaweed Farm Sdn Bhd, Semporna Farmers Organisation, SALS Agriculture Sdn Bhd, Sebangkat Reef Eco Plant Sdn Bhd, UMS Link Holdings Sdn Bhd and VC United Sdn Bhd.

Another two companies participating in the project in Kunak area are Ko-Nelayan Sabah and the Farmers Association of Kunak.

Mohd Johari also said that another 3,000 hectares will be added to the existing 8,000 hectares in Sabah which are being cultivated by 1,156 seaweed farmers most who are still applying traditional techniques that is very labour intensive.



Johari (seated, center), Yahya (seated, second right), Kamaruzaman (seated, right) and other invited guests in a group photo with signatories after the MoU signing ceremony yesterday.

He said the demand for dry seaweed was on the rise with its estimated annual demand coming to 400,000 metric tonnes including from Australia, Japan, China and Canada.

According to Mohd Johari RM12.8 million had been allocated for the development of the seaweed industry in the country while another RM750,000 has been allocated for

developing the standards for seaweed production from the farming to processing stage in order to raise the quality of the product at the international market.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister cum Agriculture and Food Industry Minister Datuk Yahya Hussin in his speech earlier pointed out that the GNI for the seaweed industry by 2020 is estimated at

RM1.4 billion.

In order to achieve the target, the Government has implemented a Entry Point Project (EPP) in its Economy Transformation Program (ETP) specifically for the development of the country's seaweed industry.

Among strategic steps taken were to transform the country's seaweed industry to a commercial

level industry with high returns, Yahya said, adding that this included the identification of new farming areas in the aquaculture industry zone.

"Not less than 43,000 hectares of coastal area in Lahad Datu, Semporna, Kunak and Tawau have been identified with high potential to be developed as seaweed farms until 2020," Yahya said.