

Expanding seaweed area by 3,000ha

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KOTA KINABALU: The State government is hoping to increase its seaweed cultivation area from the existing 8,000 to 11,000 hectares, to achieve the nation's target of producing about 35,000 metric tonnes of seaweed using modern methods by end of the year.

Deputy Chief Minister, Datuk Yahya Hussin said seaweed cultivation has increased from about 20.8 thousand metric tonne worth RM62.35 million in 2010, to 23.9 thousand metric tonne (RM66.2 million) in 2011.

"As we know, 100 per cent of seaweed production in Malaysia comes from Sabah, and with this increasing amount that we see every year, it is proven that the industry can be developed further and contribute to the Gross National Income to obtain a high income nation status.

"We have at the moment 8,000 hectares of areas in total which are used for this purpose,

mostly in Semporna (83.8 per cent), followed by Lahad Datu (13 per cent), Kunak (3 per cent), Banggi (0.2 per cent) and Tawau (0.1 per cent)," he said.

Yahya, who is Agriculture and Food Industries Minister, said this while witnessing the Seaweed Mini Estate Project signing ceremony between Universiti Malaysia Sabah and a total of 11 anchor companies based here, Tuesday.

Adding to that, Yahya said all these were produced using the most basic cultivation methods, which could be improved and multiplied, with new technology and knowledge, which will be delivered to entrepreneurs.

"I was also made to understand that two other seaweed development programmes will be introduced by the Federal Fisheries Department with the cooperation of the Sabah Fisheries Department, which is the commercial scale culturing project as well as

upgrading existing entrepreneurs programme," he said.

In this respect, Agriculture and Agro Based Industry Deputy Minister, Dato' Wira Mohd Johari Baharom is confident that the targeted extra 3,000 hectares of area for seaweed culturing can be achieved from the mini estate project. He said seaweed culturing is among the three top three industries that could reap profit, after ornamental fish (Arowana) and bird's nests.

"The government has also invested a total of RM0.75 million for research and development purposes seeing that its potential for growth in the international market is high," he stated.

"I hope existing entrepreneurs would conduct their business properly, legally and make use of proper methods in ensuring quality products for the domestic and international market," he said.

He said there are now hindrances to sales of bird's nests in the China market as a result of irresponsible traders and middlemen.

"We do not hope to see the market for seaweed and other aquaculture products go to waste because of irresponsible middlemen and sellers," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, the mini estate is a model which aims to turn the poor-man industry into a lucrative one, is based on science, technology and mechanism, to reduce dependency on human labour, makes use of community based and commercial approach methods and, to produce quality seaweed among others.

It is estimated that about 400,000 metric tonnes of seaweed are needed by import countries such as Australia, Canada, and Japan.

All the companies involved in signing for the mini estate project are based in Kunak and Semporna.