

ICT programme for Kundasang farmers planned, says Ongkili

KUNDASANG: An information and communications technology (ICT) programme aimed at improving the productivity of small farmers and ensuring Kundasang vegetables are free from excessive use of pesticides is being formulated under the auspices of the National IT Council (NITC) and relevant State departments and agencies.

NITC member, Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili, said the national Steering Committee of the programme held its second meeting in Kundasang Friday and conducted field inspection of the proposed site in Kampung Bundu Tuhan.

The programme is jointly chaired by Ongkili and the Secretary-General of the Federal Rural Development Ministry.

"The programme, to be named e-Desa Kundasang, has been submitted for funding to the NITC under its Bridging the Digital Divide project.

"The programme is expected to cost RM700,000 and will be jointly funded by the NITC, Federal Rural Development Ministry and State IT Development Unit.

"Once completed and launched, the programme will be the first of its kind in Malaysia which uses ICT solutions to remedy pesticides overuse and improve farm productivity," he said.

Ongkili, who is Science and Technology Advisor to the Chief Minister, explained that Kundasang farmers were chosen as the target of the programme in light of continuing public concerns regarding pesticide overuse by some farmers, especially those employing foreign labour.

"The basic thrust of e-Desa

Kundasang is to provide technical information regarding correct fertiliser and pesticide use to land owners and operators through ICT means such as the Internet, computer disks, audio visuals, radio and printed format.

"At the same time, the programme will provide forums for interaction, brainstorming and e-learning through an e-information centre in the format similar to an Internet café.

"Other agricultural data such as acreage of various vegetables being planted for the season and average monthly prices of vegetables will be available from the website to enable farmers to plan their production," he said.

Ongkili elaborated that data collection and software development have commenced and training of farmers in sustainable farming concepts, work values and computer literacy will commence soon.

"If all works well, the programme should be ready for launching within 12 months," he added.

Among other agencies involved in the programme are the Agriculture, Medical and Environment Departments, IDS, UMS, Farmers Association, State Environmental Action Committee and several non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

A District Implementation Committee chaired by the District Officer and comprising the local Assemblymen, government departments and community leaders also held its first meeting Friday and accompanied the Steering Committee members during the site inspection.