

# Focus on food security: CM

Larry Ralon DE 04-04-2012 2

KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and its partners have been urged to continue focusing on nutrition within the overall food production and food security debate, in assisting the Government ensure every Malaysian, especially children, have access to nutritious and quality food.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman, who made the call, said this is vital in achieving the objective of creating a society that is healthy, knowledgeable and able to contribute to Malaysia's growth.

"Nutrition, especially among children, is crucial. The Government wants to ensure that every citizen, especially our children, has access to nutritious and quality food in order to create a society that is healthy, knowledgeable and able to contribute to Malaysia's growth," he said when officiating the International Conference on Food Science and Nutrition 2012, the first of its kind to be held in Sabah.

Sabah has tremendous potential in not just its people but also the sustainable use of natural resources, including wild edible food items, most of which are still unknown to science, said Musa, adding that the State Government in partnership with the Federal Government through the various agencies has been involved in various relevant and timely development programmes aimed at improving livelihoods.

"In these undertakings, we continue to work very closely with experts from the UMS and their partners in both upstream and downstream research to come up with sustainable solutions, the enhancement of produce value, and diversification on the usage of produce," he said.

He said the world's growing population, climate change and an increase in the risk of crops failing, will accelerate the global food crisis.

"Currently we are already witnessing the negative impact and tragic consequences of food shortage due to severe floods or droughts in a number of countries. Global food security is a complex issue that requires urgent response from the international community," he said.

He said prices of many basic food items have gone up in the last two years, affecting millions of poor people nationwide, adding the World Bank reported recently the global food price index has risen by 15 per cent in between October 2010 and January last year, which is 29 per cent above its level a year before, and only three per cent below its June 2006 peak.

"Science and technology propel the economic growth, eliminate poverty and encourage sustainable development. I strongly believe that all countries should consider strategies that enhance science-based research and encourage the development of the food sector through new innovative technologies," he said.

Biotechnology, which is poised to drive the next wave of knowledge-based industries, is another powerful tool in addressing food security and hunger, he said, adding that biotechnology can be used to boost supply of safe, nutritious and affordable food.

Hoping there would be more scientific discoveries and



Musa receiving a memento from Kamaruzaman.

innovations including in the biotechnology sector to improve crop yields and enhance the food sector, Musa said application of biotechnology technologies such as genetic engineering and functional genomics must be encouraged to produce agro-biotechnology products that increase plant and livestock productivity as well as improve their agronomic traits.

He said the indigenous communities, including in Sabah, have developed ways to preserve game meat using fruits.

"Large animals are preserved for consumption at a later date in our humid, tropical weather without refrigeration. The uniqueness of this preservation technique is the finding by indigenous people that fruit used in this process must be treated before being applied to meat ... I hope that traditional knowledge would continue to flourish and one way of doing this is to marry scientific methods of research and traditional know-how," he said.

Musa also took the opportunity to share with the participants about the burgeoning seaweed industry off the northern and eastern coasts of Sabah, saying the waters in these areas are ideal for seaweed cultivation which is traditionally consumed by the coastal communities.

The areas concerned have now been identified as an important component of the National Key Economic Area for agriculture, he added, saying that to date investment in commercial seaweed cultivation in Sabah is valued at RM703million, providing jobs to 13,000 people.

The three-day conference, attended by more than 300 participants from 20 countries, is jointly organised by the UMS School of Food Science and Nutrition, Malaysian Institute of Food Technology (MIFT) and International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFOST).

The speakers involved include among others Prof Dr Geoffrey Campbell-Platt from the University of Reading, United Kingdom, who is also IUFOST President, who would present a keynote lecture on "Traditional resources – sustainable approaches for global food security", Prof Dr Daryl Lund from the United States for a public lecture on "Effective preparation of scientific manuscripts" and Prof Dr Rickey Yada from Canada on "Application of

nanotechnology in the food industry".

There would eight plenary lectures and 14 concurrent sessions with oral presentations grouped by topics throughout the conference.

UMS Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Kamaruzaman Ampon, who was also present, hoped the conference would provide a platform for the participants to deliberate on future collaborations.

He also welcomed the food industry players to discuss innovative products which can be tested in the university's laboratories and pilot plant.