

State backs all moves to boost agro-based products

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By JENNE LAJUN

KOTA KINABALU: The state government supports measures taken to increase the nation's and state's production of agricultural and agriculture-based products.

This is because the fundamental scientific discoveries and technical breakthroughs can profoundly affect economic growth and competitiveness, said Agriculture and Food Industry Ministry Datuk Rahim Ismail.

"Such breakthroughs can cause far-reaching structural and socioeconomic changes: biotechnology has the makings of such a platform," he said at the launch of the Biotechnology Symposium III 2006, themed "Agro-biotechnology: Modernising Agriculture through Molecular Biology," held at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) yesterday.

Rahim went on to say that the State has implemented the 2nd Sabah State Agriculture Policy which is a strategic plan by the state government to transform and develop the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors by 2010.

"I believe the application of new technologies such as molecular biology can help transform the lives of the local farmers by raising their socioeconomic status and creating wealth for the nation," he said.



THANKING YOU... Rahim receives a basketful of agricultural products from Noh (left), as Ann (right) looks on

He added that the National Agriculture Policy and the National Biotechnology Policy emphasised the importance of biotechnology in their implementation and through these strategies, Malaysia aspires to be self-sufficient and become a major food producer and exporter by 2010.

"This move is needed as Malaysia is currently experiencing a deficit of RM5 billion in agriculture international trade," he said. "With the implementation of the 9MP, the government focuses on revitalising and re-inventing the agriculture sector as

one of the new sources of economic growth."

The country's agriculture sector currently contributes 7.2 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 14 percent of its employment opportunities. The agro-based industry, on the other hand, achieved RM16.9 billion in 2005 and is expected to create 128,000 jobs over the next five years, he said.

Also present during the launch were UMS Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Noh Dalimin and the chairperson of the event, Professor Datin Dr Ann Anton.