

UMS awaits grant for tapioca research

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SANDAKAN: It has been established that tapioca can be used in various ways, by cultivating it for food and converting it into bio-degradable product packages that are environmentally friendly.

In pursuing its environmentally friendly concept, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), through its Sustainable Agricultural Faculty here in Sungai Batang at Mile 10 is now awaiting a research grant to enable them to do further research on tapioca.

Professor Dr Wan Mohamad Wan Othman said the Faculty is waiting for the research grant either from the government or the university, so that they can proceed with the research.

"The minimum period to cultivate tapioca is eight months from planting to harvesting. However, the period may vary depending on the type of tapioca planted. Therefore, should the Faculty receive the research grant, we can begin a study on tapioca such as its maturity period, fertilizing process, starch content, sugar content and so forth. Thereafter, the results obtained from the research will be submitted to the government, and UMS can be directly involved in the tapioca industry by providing the knowledge and skills," he told reporters after a briefing session at the faculty on Wednesday.

The briefing session was attended by Assistant Local Government and Housing Minister and Gum-Gum assemblyman Datuk Haji Zakaria Haji Mohd Edris, and chief executive officer (CEO) of Nature Harmony Industries Sdn Bhd, R. Meyyanathan.

Meanwhile, Zakaria said the state government is certainly supportive of any good ventures that are environmentally friendly.

"We will discuss the potential of cultivating tapioca on large scale in order to supply to factories involved in the tapioca industry, such as Nature Harmony Industries Sdn Bhd.

"After being briefed by R. Meyyanathan, I believe the tapioca industry can develop and boost our economic growth and in the process will surely generate more income for local cultivators," he said. R. Meyyanathan said there were only five countries worldwide that have the technology to convert tapioca for other uses.

"The countries are two states in the USA, China, Netherlands and Malaysia. In Malaysia, Perak is the pioneer in this tapioca industry. Sabah might follow in Perak's step. Therefore, we have come here to be briefed on the technology and pattern that our company have. I believe this would benefit all of us," he said. Tapioca not only known as a nutritious food but its flesh can be converted into various uses such as ethanol, flavour enhancer, noodles, tablet fillers, bio-degradable product packaging which could replace Styrofoam and plastic.