Sairin (2nd right) and Harun (2nd left) pictured having a taste of seaweed food products at one of the exhibition booths.

Govt supports UMS' research development of seaweed

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KOTA KINABALU: The State government supports Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) through its Seaweed Research Unit (UPRL) in the research development of seaweed to boost the State's economy and eradicate poverty.

Agriculture and Food Industries Assistant Minister Datuk Sairin Karno, said this is because higher public institutions play an important role in producing knowledgeable future generations to be involved in the seaweed industry.

"The research and development of the product will not only increase the productivity but also to improve the cost efficiency to fulfil local as well as the global market needs," he said when launching the UMS Seaweed Showcase 2014 at the university's Chancellor Hall here, Monday.

Sabah, he explained, is well known for its waters being suitable for the varieties of seaweed such as the red seaweed (Kappaphycus alvarezii) and green seaweed (Cauler palentillifera).

Therefore, Sairin said because the East Coast of Sabah has been identified as the best waters for the seaweed industry, it is recognised as an Aquaculture Seaweed Industry Zone.

He stated that seaweed products have a wide market in terms of manufacturing food based and non-food based products.

"The seaweed industry is expected to be developed in the 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP). The Nation's Agrofood Policy 2011-2020 has identified seaweed as one of the fishery commodities that should be increased.

"Seaweed production is expected to increase up to 900,000 metric tonnes with the export value of dry seaweed and carrageenan worth about RM1.4 billion in year 2020," he said, adding that Australia, Canada and Japan are the main imports of dry seaweed.

The Agriculture and Agrobased Industry Ministry has taken a strategic approach to upgrade the small scale group of seaweed cultivators into clusters through the provision of proper facilities that can create a more conducive and safer working environment.

Meanwhile, UMS Vice Chancellor, Professor Datuk Dr. Mohd Harun Abdullah said the university has been involved in the research of seaweed since 1998 through the Hardcore Poor Housing project (PPRT) in Pulau Bangi.

"The project was part of the effort to help increase the income of the people through the cultivation of seaweed," he said, adding that the project that went through a series of innovation and improvement by the university researchers has managed to identify the problems faced by the seaweed cultivators in Sabah.

He also said the invention of 'Seaweed Culture through Mini Estate' had also been turned into a model to increase the farmers and nation's income apart from opening up more job opportunities.

"In UMS, seaweed food based products had been developed through research by the researchers at the Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition. The researchers had also won silver medal in the BioMalaysia Conference and Exhibition 2010 through their seaweed noodles product.

"The seaweed products have been rapidly developed through the production of seaweed acar, bubble tea seaweed, chocolate seaweed, seaweed cakes, seaweed crackers, seaweed noodles, seaweed dodol and others," he said, explaining that seaweed contain high sources of mineral, protein, vitamin, low level of lipid, Omega-3 besides acting as an anti blood-clotting and lowering blood pressure agent.

The event also saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Harun and Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (Sirim) Chief Executive Officer cum Chairman Datuk Dr. Zainal Abidin Mohd Yusof.

The signing of MoU was done to strengthen the collaboration of both parties in terms of seaweed research and innovation.