Taiwan Napier Grass.

The Thai Napier Grass.

# BEBC-UMS effort on Napier

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SANDAKAN: The BIMP-Eaga Business Council (BEBC) Malaysia intends to collaborate with Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Sandakan campus on Hybrid Napier grass plantation and its development.

A discussion to this effect was held between BBEC Malaysia Chairman Datuk Roselan Johar Mohamed and UMS Sandakan Campus Agriculture Faculty Dean Dr Saafie Salleh, here, recently.

According to Roselan, the discussion outcome was positive as Dr Saafie also agreed that they should place emphasis on stimulation of Taiwan Napier growth.

He said, at the moment, UMS Sandakan Agriculture Faculty also has another species of Napier grass that is Thai Napier, but that it was imperative to reconfirm the protein contents of these two species.

Based on readings, Roselan said the Taiwan Napier produces between 33 and 40 per cent protein contents whilst the Thai species only have about 23 per cent of protein.

"We hope, in the next few weeks, these protein contents can be ascertained and we can then decide on which species to be given the highest priority to plant," he said.

Further study on the protein content would also be helpful in determining the possibility of Napier grass substituting imported corn, which made up 50 per cent of animal feeds total gross content.

According to him, the BIMP-Eaga in its previous agriculture meetings held a considered opinion that the livestock industry will continue to expand when more Napier grass is grown.

However, this has yet to be tested because, so far, nobody has done this on the large scale, except the small plantations in Keningau.

Roselan speaking during the meeting with Dr Saafie.

Having said that, Roselan said livestock population will multiply when food is available in abundance.

"So there is a direct and clear correlation between Napier growing region and the livestock population," he said.

Roselan also said if further study on Napier grass found it has more protein content than the imported corns then a UMS certification on this can greatly help to reduce corn imports, thus conserving the country's much needed foreign exchange.

"Then Napier grass planting can take off and it would then becomes a success story for UMS.

"With this, UMS Sandakan can now set up a team to study all the available lands with the Land and Surveys Department and to apply for lands within the vicinity of the campus in lots of 500 and 1,000 acres.

"When we have the land in hand, there will be many private sectors who are only too willing to invest in the planting of Hybrid Napier grass.

"UMS can use this land as its equity and waiting for the annual recurring income to finance more research projects," he said.

Roselan said it would not be surprising that UMS will be self-sustenance and no longer need to depend on operating grants in the not too distant future.

In this respect, BEBC would be preparing the project paper for the development of Napier grass plantation in collaboration with UMS Sandakan in particular.

On another note, Roselan said he could not help but notice during his visit to the UMS Sandakan campus that if given the extra budget to expand, the entire area could well be a site for tourist expedition and tours.

"I truly like the lakes and the serenity it exhibits. There is good possibility if hotel-like cabins can be erected along the lakeside to offer homestay facility for tourists and family visit," he said.