

UMS food scientists help Kundasang tomato farmers diversify

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Japiril and a stockpile of tomatoes.

KOTA KINABALU: Tomato farmers at the foothills of Mount Kinabalu – Kundasang – have been taught ways to diversify their products for a bigger market following an oversupply of produce due to the movement control order (MCO).

This was made possible by a team of experts from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) who conducted a demonstration of processing, bottling and packaging of tomato products recently.

All quality control and product safety procedures were demonstrated and practised by participants.

The participants also tried several recipes for tomato sauce.

They then tasted the finished products to identify the formulation that is most acceptable to local consumers' taste preferences.

The team comprising of Dr Mansoor Abdul Hamid, food technologist from the Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition; Dr Jurry Foo, local knowledge expert from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; and Dr Yasmin Ooi, nutritionist and coordinator of AgriSolutions; conducted a technology intervention session at Kundasang Guesthouse.



Participants learning to make tomato paste and sauce.

Ooi said AgriSolutions is a multi-discipline team from UMS which offers farm-to-plate solutions for agriculture and food-related issues.

“Hence, this programme aims to guide tomato farmers in Kundasang on how to process and store tomato produce as an effort to mitigate the tomato pile-up that could not reach buyers,” she said.

“This one-day demonstration is just the beginning, as more interventions will be conducted in the future to help farmers here,” she said.

Ooi said appropriate safety procedures were observed throughout the programme, with the number of participants limited according to the available space so that physical social distancing could be observed.

“Not only attendance and body temperature of participants and facilitators were recorded, the standard operating procedure for fieldwork by UMS for the new normal was also observed, and every participant completed an informed consent form,” she said.

Foo said processing tomatoes into sauce and paste not only helps overcome the oversupply issue but at the same time, gives added value to the tomatoes produced by farmers in Kundasang.

Japiril Suhaimin, who represented the farmers, had invited UMS for this technology intervention and also coordinated the programme.

“Since the MCO was implemented, vegetable farmers in Kundasang faced problems in selling their agricultural produce. Thus, such help is very much appreciated,” he said.

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