

# A new era for agriculture sector

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**Chief Minister says Sarawak can be net exporter of high quality farm products through transformation**



Abang Johari (third left) symbolically planting a durian sapling to officially launch Icaas 2017 at BCKK yesterday. Also seen are (from left) Mohamad Morshidi, Uggah, Ismawi, Jabu and Idris. — Photo by Chimon Upon

KUCHING: Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg wants Sarawak to be a net exporter of high quality agriculture produce and products that meet the needs of both domestic and global markets.

However, the Chief Minister believed this vision could only be achieved through the transformation of the agriculture sector.

“I would like the sector to be competitive, vibrant, dynamic, sustainable and capable to generate more new innovative businesses and high value employment opportunities,” he said in his keynote address at the opening of the International Conference on Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Sarawak (Icaas) 2017 at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching here yesterday.

“For a start, our target is to increase the monthly household income of the farmers from RM2,750 to at least RM4,000 by 2020. We will reduce the 50 per cent mean household income disparity between the rural at RM2,754 and urban at RM5,516. Through this effort, we will also be able to alleviate the incidence of poverty in the rural areas from the current level of 1.6 per cent.

“For food production, we aim to increase our self-sufficiency level (SSL) in food. Presently our SSL targets for food items are, for rice from 53 per cent to 60 per cent, fruits and vegetables from 60 per cent to 65 per cent, fisheries from 92 per cent to 100 per cent and beef from 10 per cent to 50 per cent.”

In noting that the state has a challenging task ahead in transforming its agriculture sector, Abang Johari pointed out that the people, especially the youth, need to change their perception that agriculture is associated with low wages, intensive labour, low applications of technology, traditional agriculture practices, insufficient injection of capital, unorganised farming communities, poverty and that agriculture is all about rural areas.

“I strongly believe that this negative mindset needs to be changed. In fact, agriculture is no longer as such but rather a lucrative and profitable venture. It is knowledge-based, high income, using digital and high tech applications, modern management practices, capital intensive and has greater market access.”

For the state to achieve the vision and its objectives, Abang Johari said the state needs to have innovative and effective strategies and initiatives.

“Our main strategies are modernisation, commercialisation and application of digital technology. Through modernisation, we should be able to increase the production, productivity and quality standards of our agriculture products.

“Through commercialisation, we should be able to attract greater private sector participation that will bring in capital, modern management, latest technologies and market access. To be competitive, we need to adopt the latest agricultural technology and take full advantage of the opportunities provided by advances in digital technology.”

In order for those strategies to be operational, Abang Johari highlighted 13 key initiatives that are being implemented.

He said the state is strengthening the capacity and capability of its human capital to become highly knowledgeable, technically competent, business oriented and marketing savvy, apart from expanding its marketing network through trading hubs, strengthening transportation and logistics, and expanding and improving warehouses and collection, processing and packaging centres (CPPC) and equipping them with digital infrastructures.

“We are setting up a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to attract more private sector investment, promote trade to enable our agriculture products to enter the global market. We are also strengthening our financing model for the agriculture sector not only through conventional banking but also through venture capital. For this purpose, I have approved an allocation of RM100 million.

“We undertake aggressive and systematic investment and trade promotion to promote Sarawak as the ideal destination for agriculture and agro-based industry. We will continue to identify appropriate business models to integrate all players within the supply chain to enhance the development competitiveness of the agriculture sector.”



Abang Johari (fifth right), (from left) Talib, Dr Rundi, Morshidi, Nogeh, Uggah, Ismawi, Jabu, Idris and Gerawat giving their thumbs-up after the launch of Icaas 2017 yesterday. — Photos by Chimon Upon



Abang Johari (fourth right) launching the exhibition held in conjunction with Icaas 2017 at BCCK yesterday. Also seen are Uggah (third left), Morshidi (fourth left) and Ismawi (third right).

Abang Johari also said that the state is applying modern and digital technologies including fertigation, smart farming and artificial insemination (AI) to increase production and improve quality standards especially to meet export market requirements.

“We strengthen our enforcement for sustainable management of our marine resources and promote downstream processing industries. We are also expanding the planted areas for other commodities and food crops besides oil palm such as rubber, pepper, sago, cocoa, coconut, pineapple, durian and rambutan.”

Abang Johari said the state is setting up farming incubators and encourages in-situ (on site) research and development (R&D) that utilise digital technology to collect and analyse critical data to manage the farming variable, besides stressing that R&D activities will focus on areas that can generate high value-added agriculture products.

“We develop and manage the full supply chain of our agriculture industry from farm to table and the value chain involving downstream agro-based industries. We establish regional development agencies such as Highland Development Agency (HDA) and Upper Rajang Development Agency (Urda) and implement other major regional development projects such as Sarikei-Bintangor-Betong Food Basket, Bukit Sadok Agropolitan and Tanjung Manis Halal Hub.”

Having dwelled on the background and set the broad direction for the transformation of the agriculture sector in the state, Abang Johari believes that there is always room for improvement and thus, require new and innovative ideas for the successful transformation of the agriculture sector.

Among those present at the event were Abang Johari’s wife Datin Amar Dato Juma’ani Tuanku Bujang, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas, Science Advisor to the State Government Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu Numpang, State Secretary Tan Sri Datuk Amar Mohamad Morshidi Abdul Ghani, Utilities Minister Dato Sri Dr Stephen Rundi Utom, Performance Management and Delivery Unit president and chief executive officer Datuk Seri Idris Jala, Minister in the Chief Minister’s Office (Integrity and Ombudsman) Datuk Talib Zulpilip, State Legislative Assembly deputy speaker Datuk

Gerawat Gala, Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Anthony Nogueh Gumbek and Deputy State Secretary Datu Ismawi Ismuni.