Research

Eggplant planting using fertigation technology in UMP campus

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In a move to fully utilise unused area in campus, UMP Technology Sdn. Bhd. (UMPT) which is wholly-owned by UMP Holdings Sdn. Bhd. and tasked to promote commercialisation activities of UMP products, has successfully cultivated eggplant using the fertigation technology at the university's Gambang campus.

Research and planning on the project commenced middle of last year while work on the farming site and other related activities began in January this year following approval from the management and UMP Holdings Sdn. Bhd.

According to UMPT General Manager, Dr. Nur Aainaa Syafini Mohd Radzi, the site covered an area of 3.86 acres and planted with 15,000 eggplant trees for commercial purposes while another 1,000 trees for experimental purposes and technology improvement.

"The eggplants were placed in a nursery for growing before transferred into polybags in March and April. We started harvesting the produce in the middle of May.

"*Alhamdulillah,* we harvested between 250kg and 350kg every two days. We expect the produce to increase between 1.2 tonnes and 1.5 tonnes beginning June and will continue to harvest the produce until November," she said.

She added that currently, the produce were sold from the farm to wholesalers and nearby supermarkets at RM6 per kg.

Dr. Nur Aainaa Syafini said the fertigation technology was not new for UMP as the university had carried out several farming projects using the technology for research purposes at the UMP Model Farm and community activities to help improve the locals' earnings through the Facelift D'Kuala programme in Kuala Pahang.

"Based on the potentials in using this system especially the lucrative returns, which is three to four times higher as compared to the conventional farming method, has attracted the attention of many parties to use the technique for commercial ventures.

"This will also open the door for UMP other products to be commercially produced.

"Fertigation is a farming technique that maximises the produce through controlled application of water and fertiliser.

"This application will ensure that adverse impacts from the use of fertiliser to the root, soil and underground water can be avoided. When the fertigation technique is applied, it involves substrate

and media such as coconut husks and rice husk ash," she said.

She also said farming could be done without the use of fertile soil and can be carried out in urban area or places where land were scarce, adding, it could help increase produce and prevent soil-borne diseases.

"Apart from helping to churn money for the company, this pilot project had its own advantages because it was located inside campus area," she added.

She hoped that the project would pave the way for other UMP agriculture-based products be commercially made and produced in a big scale for the open market.

"We hope that we are able to expand farming activities using the fertigation technology so UMPT can be one the major vegetable producers in Pahang.

"At the same time, the project will provide job opportunities to UMP students and the locals to boost their income," she said.

UMPT is now in the process of identifying areas near the campus that could be leased by the company for a certain period of time as well as to obtain suitable land for expansion purposes using the fertigation technology.

Throughout the implementation of the project, UMPT consulted the Department of Agriculture and collaborated with Federal Agriculture Marketing Agency (FAMA) for the commercialisation aspect of the produce.

For those who are interested to do their own fertigation farming project, UMPT offers consultation services and training on how to start the project.

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