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UMS school to help transform agri sector

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KOTA KINABALU: Sekolah Pertanian Lestari (SPL) of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) aspires to produce human capital capable of transforming the agriculture sector in Sabah.

The 13th UMS school in Sandakan which has been operational since last year has accepted 74 undergraduates for the academic session 2006/2007 to pursue three programmes – Crop Production, Landscape and Horticulture, and Livestock Production Programme.

Agriculture and Food Industry Minister, Datuk Abdul Rahim Ismail, said Sabah needs quality, knowledgeable and calibre human capital to translate State policies that would develop agriculture particularly in rural areas.

“The establishment of this school is timely as it is in line with the State’s development agenda (halatuhu) based on three sectors, agriculture being among them.

“The school is expected not only to generate academic qualification on paper but also produce quality, responsible and down-to-earth graduates who are willing and committed to help rural farmers in improving their production and modernising their methods,” he said.

Rahim was speaking to reporters at the official launching of a one-day Workshop on Cooperation of SPL in the Agriculture Industry at a hotel, here, Monday.

Also present were UMS Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Datuk Dr Mohd Noh Dalimin, and the school’s dean, Associate Professor Dr Wan Mohamad Wan Othman.

Rahim said graduates should not to feel embarrassed to set foot into paddy fields, livestock compounds and fish ponds, among others, as this is one way to directly involved with agricultural activities and gain invaluable experiences.

“It is not sufficient for the graduates to just present what they know in paper and present them in seminars or workshops here and there but when it comes to the field ground...they have nothing. We also do not

want them to just stay in the office and do administrative works.

“That is why the State wants the new crop of the SPL graduates to reflect the expected work culture and willing to face present and future challenges in developing the State’s agriculture industry,” Rahim said.

On transforming rural agriculture, he said, almost 70 per cent of farmers, fishermen and livestock breeders are in rural areas where they need to be exposed to modern methods that can improve their production.

“The State has many programmes to transform rural agriculture, which is stated in the Sabah Agriculture Policy 2 (DPNS2), to elevate their source of income in the sector and eradicate poverty.

“But all of these need participation and commitment from agriculture people to willingly accept with open minds the transformation process,” he said.

Meanwhile, UMS Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Datuk Dr Mohd Noh Dalimin said the setting up of SPL followed the approval of the Federal Government and that more than RM100 million has been channelled to build its campus in Sandakan under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP).

“We are truly grateful to the Federal Government to realise this dream under the 9MP and to the State Government under the leadership of the Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa for awarding 99ha for the development of the UMS-SPL at Mile 10, Sg Batang, in Sandakan.

“Such strong support proves that the Federal and State governments want to see socio-economic development and educate the communities through a new way of developing the agriculture sector in Sabah,” he said in his speech at the same event.

Hence, Mohd Noh said the establishment of the SPL would support the State’s aspiration to produce a first class human capital, particularly in the agriculture industry.