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## Higher yield, better income with Smart SBB

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**DATUK AZMAN MAHMOOD**  
Agriculture and Food Security Ministry (Padi and Rice Regulatory Division) director-general

**Kamarudin Dahuli**

**Mohamad Farid Shafie**

The government is committed to expanding the Large-Scale Smart Padi Project (Smart SBB) nationwide, given its success in producing a higher yield of padi.

The project is implemented through public-private partnership to boost padi production and increase farmers' revenue, with the costs to be borne by industry players. The project aims to minimise the involvement of middlemen, and improve production and distribution of rice in the country.

Agriculture and Food Security Ministry (Padi and Rice Regulatory Division) director-general Datuk Azman Mahmood said the programme aims to boost crop yield and farmers' income without relying on additional government funds.

The capital expenditure for the project is provided by the leading companies, which will inject capital of up to RM3,500 per hectare throughout the padi planting season.

This investment covers various stages, from initial processes like land ploughing and liming to utilising agricultural input, such as fertilisers, pesticides and machinery, during harvesting.

"Up to May, the programme has been rolled out nationwide, except in Johor and Melaka, benefiting 10,585 farmers in 79 locations.

There are 14 leading companies, managing more than 34,000ha with an average yield of five to six metric tonnes per hectare," he said on Monday.

He said the Smart SBB Ala Sekinchan programme, covering 10 locations and spanning over 692 hectares, yielded an average of six to eight metric tonnes per hectare.

In the coming month, the programme will be launched in Bagan Serai, Perak; Kuala Pilah, Negri Sembilan; Block B, Seberang Perak, Perak, and Kota Belud, Sabah.

Azman emphasised the ministry's commitment to expanding the Smart SBB programme across the country by encouraging farmer participation.

"Efforts to encourage farmers to participate in Smart SBB must rely heavily on close cooperation among stakeholders along the industry value chain, especially farmers as key partners of the government.

The role of the ministry's departments and agencies is also crucial to ensure accurate information about this programme reaches the farmers."

He said this approach would enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the national rice industry through private investment, gradually reducing the dependence on subsidised agricultural inputs.

"Aspects such as infrastructure for irrigation and drainage must be given top priority to encourage farmers to join Smart SBB, and adopt proper and best farming practices.

The government will expand the use of groundwater systems in padi fields in preparation for the expected more severe dry season next year, in which this system can also reduce dependence on rainfall," he said, adding that the use of groundwater has already been implemented in the Integrated Agricultural Development Area of Batang Lupar, Sarawak.

He said the government will also introduce rice varieties that are more drought-resistant and can be harvested in just 80 days, compared with the current 105 to 110 days to assist farmers in increasing their crop yields.

This initiative would commence next year, signalling a significant shift in the industry.

Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) general manager Kamarudin Dahuli said the Smart SBB initiative has not only bolstered the nation's padi cultivation but has also brought the country closer to the objective of eliminating hardcore poverty.

He said farmers participating in the programme only require two-hectare plots to achieve productivity levels equivalent to those of five-hectare padi fields.

"On average, padi farmers here are managing only two hectares, so at that scale, it's not economical. With Smart SBB, even those with small plots like two hectares can yield high returns.

To ensure the best income for our farmers, we use proper management techniques. That's why through Smart SBB, even with two hectares, when managed efficiently by an entity such as an anchor or leading company, it can help increase the yields for farmers."

Kamarudin said another factor contributing to higher profits is the reduced cost through economies of scale.

"Activities like fertilising can be managed on a larger scale to reduce costs. For instance, let's say a farmer manages one or two hectares, the cost for one hectare might be around RM250. But when done on a larger scale, involving more participants, the costs can be reduced," he added.

He expressed confidence that the programme would significantly contribute to enhancing food security for the country, with white rice being the nation's staple food.

"We hope it will increase the nation's padi production and achieve the target set for 2025, aiming for 75 per cent self-sufficiency, and by 2030, reaching 80 per cent.

"If executed effectively and we achieve these set targets, the country's food security will be assured."

Kamarudin said Mada will expand the project by 100ha within this year.

"Last year, 224,880ha of padi fields in the Mada areas implemented the Smart SBB Ala Sekinchan programme, involving one location in Perlis and four locations in Kedah. Overall, 89 participants were involved, comprising five area farmer organisations.

"This year, Mada plans to continue this programme with 100 additional hectares expected in the first padi cultivation season with Felcra Niaga Sdn Bhd as a leading company," he added.

Commenting further, he said Mada and the ministry will provide various initiatives to ensure the success of farmers under the Smart SBB programme.

"Through this programme, farmers don't need to invest in farming inputs and mechanical services or pay for fieldwork as these costs are covered by the leading companies."

"Additionally, the ministry will allocate funds to Mada to upgrade and maintain infrastructure in involved areas.

Mada will also conduct monitoring and implement development programmes to minimise yield loss due to crop pests. We will also implement padi yield enhancement programmes, such as ensuring the use of certified padi seeds, soil fertility restoration, and additional fertiliser application in the involved areas.

Smart SBB Ala Sekinchan programme supervisor Mohamad Farid Shafie, 38, confirmed that the programme has successfully increased yields since its implementation in the second padi cultivation season of last year.

He said the 10 participants in Kampung Gulau, Pendang, have yielded higher returns.

"We managed this Smart SBB project on a 39ha field. Before adopting this concept, the average yield per season was 5.5 tonnes per hectare, but after the second cultivation season in March last year, it increased to 6.4 tonnes per hectare."

"Through this concept, participants need to adhere to planting schedules up to the pesticide application stage. It needs to be synchronised, this indirectly controls disease and pest infestation from spreading.

"It saves pesticide costs, and the increasing padi yields also enhance our income," said Farid, who has been managing padi fields since 2013.

Farid, a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering graduate from Universiti Kuala Lumpur, expressed gratitude for being selected for the programme, citing assistance and guidance from ministry agencies such as Mada.

"As farmers, our attitudes need to change, we need to spend more time in the fields, not just plant and leave. Field cleanliness needs to be prioritised to prevent padi from getting diseases.

"Most importantly, farmers need knowledge and should not solely rely on physical strength. For the next season, we aim to increase padi yields to nine tonnes per hectare and successfully match the harvest rates in Sekinchan, Selangor, which range from 10 to 12 tonnes per hectare."

**DISEDIAKAN  
OLEH**

**PN NOR SURIANI BINTI MOHD ZIN (S44), BPM**