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**FEATURE ARTICLE**



# Blending modern living with sustainable agriculture

Sarawak's smart township initiative kicks start a new trend



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**A**s global urbanisation continues to rise, the need for sustainable, self-sufficient urban models becomes increasingly urgent. Recognising this, Sarawak is embarking on a groundbreaking initiative to incorporate smart farming into its new township developments. This forward-thinking approach not only seeks to boost local food production but also aims to create a harmonious blend of urban living and advanced agricultural practices.

But what are the potential benefits and long-term implications of Sarawak's smart township project, which was first implemented in Kuala Baram, Miri, and what it could mean for the future of urban development in Malaysia?

**The rationale behind the vision**

This Sarawak government's vision, led by Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg, spans 300 acres. This project is not merely another residential development but a holistic approach to urban living that integrates cutting-edge agricultural practices within a residential framework. Of the 300 acres, 10% of the land is dedicated to smart farming, involving direct community participation.

This initiative, in collaboration with the Sarawak Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA) and Simfoni Strategi Sdn Bhd, draws inspiration from successful smart farming models in Japan and Taiwan. These countries have demonstrated how urban areas can coexist with agricultural activities, leading to a more sustainable and resilient urban environment.

As smart farming lies at the heart of this new township project, the implementation of advanced agricultural technologies that emphasise precision, efficiency and sustainability is crucial. These technologies include automated irrigation systems, climate control and pest management, all of which can be managed via mobile applications. The ultimate goal is to reduce production costs, stabilise market prices and ensure a consistent supply of high-quality produce.

One of the standout features of the smart farming initiative is the cultivation of golden melons, a high-value crop that is particularly popular in Japan. "Golden melons can cost up to about RM100 each in Japan. I believe the production cost in Sarawak may be lower. If we can produce higher volume, it could provide extra income for rural agripreneurs, particularly if the project is expanded to rural satellite towns," Abang Johari said.

Using advanced technology, including drones and tablets, the production of golden melons in Sarawak is expected to be both cost-effective and profitable. The integration of smart farming into residential areas is a key aspect of the new township's design. Homes in the township will feature gardens where residents can cultivate high-value fruits, not only for their own consumption but also for the local and international markets. This approach promotes self-sufficiency and fosters a sense of community, where residents actively participate in food production and contribute to a shared goal of sustainable living.

This community-centric model aligns with Sarawak's broader goals of boosting food security and reducing reliance on imported food. By engaging residents in agricultural activities, the township aims to create a more resilient urban environment that can withstand the challenges of food scarcity and fluctuating market prices.

**Scaling the model**

The Kuala Baram smart township project is envisioned as the first step in a larger strategy to transform Sarawak's rural areas into productive, self-sustaining communities. If successful, the model will be replicated in rural satellite towns, providing affordable housing and opportunities for lower-income groups to participate in the agricultural economy. This expansion is crucial to Sarawak's long-term goal of becoming Malaysia's next rice bowl, capable of sustaining itself and contributing to the nation's food security.

In line with this vision, the Sarawak government is setting aside RM1bil to develop 10,000 hectares in Stumbin, Lingga and Tanjung Bijat in Sri Aman Division for large-scale paddy planting. This ambitious plan underscores the state's commitment to not only increasing its food production but also ensuring that its rural populations benefit from the economic opportunities that come with it.

responsibility among residents. By involving them in food production, the township fosters a culture of sustainability and environmental stewardship. Residents not only benefit from the fresh produce grown in their gardens but also gain a deeper understanding of the importance of sustainable living practices.

Additionally, the project offers new income streams for residents, particularly those from lower-income groups. By participating in the cultivation of high-value crops like golden melons, residents can supplement their incomes and improve their overall quality of life. This aligns with the state's broader goal of reducing poverty and increasing economic opportunities for its rural populations.

**The future of urban living**

Sarawak's smart township initiative represents a bold and innovative approach to urban development, where technology and sustainability go hand in hand. observed a Sarawak-based property stakeholder. By blending modern living with advanced agricultural practices, the state is setting a new standard for residential projects in Malaysia, he said.

This visionary approach has the potential to transform not only the way people live but also how they interact with their environment, creating a model for future urban developments.

As the world grapples with the challenges of rapid urbanisation and food insecurity, Sarawak's smart township project offers a glimpse into the future of sustainable urban living. By integrating smart farming into its urban landscape, Sarawak is positioning itself as a leader in sustainable development, with the potential to inspire similar projects across the region and beyond.

Sarawak's incorporation of smart farming into new township developments is a groundbreaking step towards sustainable living and enhanced food production. As the state pioneers this innovative approach, the potential for widespread adoption and long-term benefits is immense. By fostering a community-centred, technologically advanced environment, Sarawak is not only addressing the immediate challenges of food security and urbanisation but also paving the way for a more sustainable and resilient future. The smart township project in Kuala Baram is more than just a residential development - it is a blueprint for the future of urban living in Sarawak and beyond.

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