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Watermelon Farming

Agriculture and agrifood sector in Brunei Darussalam is continuously making positive development with the transition of traditional or conventional farming method to technology-based system.

Statistics showed that for the past five years (2006-2010), there were increases in commodity production from \$171.75 million in 2006 to \$228.43 in 2010.

The statistic further revealed that for 2010, the main contributor in the development of agriculture and agrifood was the poultry sector followed by agricultural sector and agrifood processing.

The active agriculture and agrifood entrepreneurs are made up of commercial producers, small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) and traditional farmers. Year 2010 recorded 5039 entrepreneurs involved in agribusiness activities.

Brunei Today will feature interviews with two entrepreneurs involve in agriculture, farming of watermelon.

Watermelon is a well-known fruit where its scientific name is *Citrullus lanatus*; and a member of the cucurbitaceae family.

Due to its juicy nature, watermelon is perfect for thirst quencher and often made into juice. Furthermore, the fruit is edible as not only the flesh can be eaten but also the rind. The rind is usually cooked as vegetables.



A daily routine, Awang Azman checks his farm.



Growing watermelon may take up to 120 days (until harvesting) depending on the location of planting. Pictures show watermelon seedlings.



A sample of his watermelon on display at the stall.



The agriculture and agrifood statistic in 2010 showed that based on quantity, watermelon was placed on the sixth position out of 15 in the production of local fruit. In 2010, Brunei Darussalam produced 181,349 kilogrammes of watermelon which had a market value of \$232,141.

Our first interview will feature one of the local young farmers, Awang Azman, aged 37. He is a full time watermelon farmer since 2005 where prior to that he was formerly a member of the civil service.

After 15 years of services, he expressed his satisfaction in being self-employed but reminded that one must possess a strong spirit and has good management.

"I inherited the watermelon farming skill from my father where I used to join him to farm since aged 3 years old," said Awang Azman.

With his own capital of \$400 and agriculture vehicle, Awang Azman started his enterprise (farming and selling of watermelon) with three assistants.

Currently he runs his farm in two Temporary Occupation License (TOL) lands in Kampung Sungai Jambu (1.2 acres) and Kampung Sungai Paku (three acres) - both located in Tutong District. In combination, both farms are able to produce five tonnes of watermelon.

His farms produce three types of watermelon - the red, yellow and seedless. The most demanded watermelon is the yellow watermelon.

In olden day, according to Awang Azman, people said that the perfect time for planting watermelon is after the Chinese New Year but actually the fruit is not seasonal and Brunei Darussalam has great potential for watermelon farming, he said.

In a year, the watermelon farm can make up to three harvesting, he added.

He also shared a tip that the most needed item in watermelon farming is an area with proper water treatment and system.

Meanwhile on sales part, Awang Azman does direct selling of his watermelon at roadside stall which is opened from 11.00 am to 6.30 pm.

"The selling of watermelons is quite good especially during weekend and public holiday and could reach up to \$700 - \$800 per day with the highest income earned was \$1700," he said.

Meanwhile for weekdays, he usually earned around \$200 - \$300 daily.

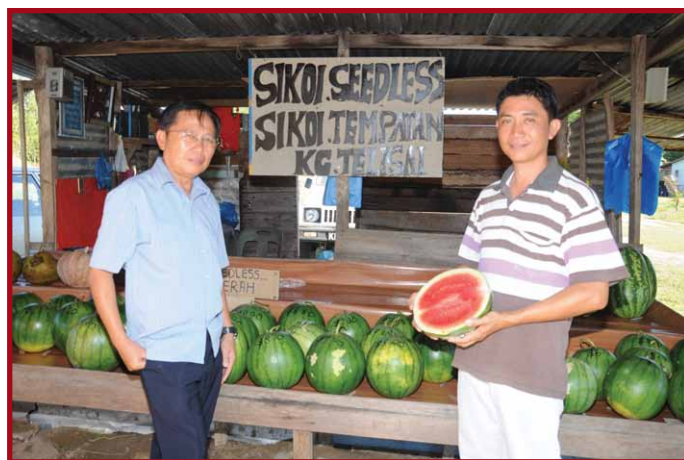
The average profit per month could reach up to \$15,000 - \$17,000 while the minimum is around \$8000.



Awang Azman's stall is quite well-known among watermelon lovers.



A customer purchasing watermelon.



The village head of Kampung Telisai visiting the watermelon stall as part of his routine visiting the villagers.





The watermelons are priced according to its weight.

He also expressed his hope that the farming of watermelon will gain more support from the relevant authority; among others is by providing appropriate land or area for farming.

"This enterprise is able to generate income not only for oneself but also for the country if it is run with good and proper plan," he said at the end of the interview.

Brunei Today also had the opportunity to interview a veteran watermelon farmer, Dayang Hajah Rosinah, aged 66. She has been actively involved in the farming of watermelon since she was 10 years old and had inherited the farming skill from her mother.

She remembered that her first capital was around \$200 - \$300 and the seedlings sown from watermelon seeds. Meanwhile the fertilisers were subsidised by the Department of Agriculture and Agrifood.

Similar to Awang Azman, she also sells her own watermelons and has regular customers. She priced the red watermelon at \$1.00 per kilo while the yellow watermelon at \$1.50 per kilo. Her income per harvest on 0.5 acres of land can reach up to \$10,000.

"Watermelon farming is not an easy process, for example the land itself needs to be cleared or 'rest' for few months before being used for farming," she said.

She further stated that the major problem is fungal disease especially during rainy and windy season. There was a time where all crops were damaged due to the disease and she needed to replant the seedlings.



The watermelon rinds are also cooked as vegetables.





Perusahaan Seri Melati

Pioneer in fiberglass boat-making

In its bid to promote economic diversification, the Government of Brunei Darussalam is continuously making efforts in encouraging the development of small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs).

In 2008, there were 9150 SMEs contributing to 98.37 per cent of total entrepreneurship registered for all sectors. The highest type of SME was in the service sector while the lowest was in saw mill and other woods processing industry.

Various ministries under the government such as Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR) and the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB), Prime Minister's Office are providing opportunities and incentives in assisting the development of SMEs.

The establishment of Entrepreneurial Development Centre at the MIPR acts as a nerve centre for the growth and development of SME in the country. The centre provides facilities and expertise for the purpose of facilitating the growth and development of SME by providing quality, effective and dynamic entrepreneurial assistance.

Financing schemes have also been introduced such as the Enterprise Facilitation Schemes (EFS) and Micro-Credit Financing

Scheme (MFS) introduced in 1999 and 2001 respectively. Later in 2010, a new refinancing scheme, 'Export Refinancing Scheme' (ERS) was introduced to encourage SMEs to succeed in export activities.

Development of SMEs is hoped to not only enhance the country's economy but also assist in reducing unemployment rate.

Brunei Today for this edition will highlight on Perusahaan Seri Melati, the pioneer in fiberglass enterprise in Brunei Darussalam.

The enterprise was established in 1977 by Awang Haji Mahmood bin Awang Damit at his residence in Kampung Sengkarai, Tutong District. Later in 1986, the business was taken over by his son, Awang Haji Abd. Rashid.

Awang Haji Abd. Rashid stated that his late father first learnt the fiberglass boat-making skills from relatives in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia who carried out the fiberglass enterprise.

At the time, most of the fiberglass boats in Brunei were imported from neighbouring countries as there was no respective enterprise established in Brunei.



Perusahaan Seri Melati operating at this site since 1979.



Jet Ski, one of Perusahaan Seri Melati's products.



Another product of the enterprise.

The establishment of Perusahaan Seri Melati marked a milestone in the country's boat-making industry as the first fiberglass boat enterprise undertaken by local. Its establishment was very well received by public, government and private sectors.

Later due to overwhelming demand from customers, Perusahaan Seri Melati applied for a proper site for its operation from the relevant government agency. In 1979, the enterprise moved to its current site (by Temporary Occupation License - TOL) in Kampung Kuala Tutong, about five kilometres from Tutong Town.

On the financial side, the enterprise has received assistance from the Brunei Economic and Development Board (BEDB) and bank.

Currently, the enterprise is manned by 18 workers comprising of both local and foreign. The new local workers hired will be trained through in job training while the foreigners hired are usually those who are readily skilled and experienced according to the needs of the enterprise.



Pictures 1-3 : Some of the materials being used in the process of making fiberglass products.



At the workshop

Work in progress at the workshop. Workers' safety is a concern for Awang Haji Mahmood.





The workshop to build the boats.

As a non-seasonal business, Perusahaan Seri Melati not only offers fiberglass boat-making and repairs but also received demands for making fiberglass related products.

The enterprise produces various types of fiberglass boats ranging from 11 feet to 31 feet long. Most of the boats made are according to the customers' specifications and compatible to local weather and water. The most popular fiberglass boat is a boat measuring 17 feet and 21 feet long.

For safety reason, every boat produced is equipped with foam kept at a special area on the floor space.

The time taken to make a boat depends on the boat's size.

A small boat may only take about one week while the larger one may require one to two months for completion. Among the items used in the fiberglass boat-making are wood and plywood and also chemicals like gel coat, polyester resin, catalyst and pigment colour.

"Although the making of fiberglass boat and other fiberglass items look easy, but it needs experience and passion.

The mistakes in mixing the chemical and not according to right timing may lead to defect products," said Awang Haji Abd. Rashid.



Some of the finished products ready for collection.



One of the fiberglass boat types produced at the enterprise.



Meanwhile, the prices are based on size, shape and the thickness of fiberglass requested by the customer, he added.

The enterprise is licensed by the Ministry of Communications through the Marine Department for the purpose of 'Fiberglass boat and fiberglass products Industrial Workshop', he said.

Awang Haji Abd. Rashid also expressed his hope to expand and develop his enterprise in future.

He further added that even though his enterprise only received local demand, they are ready for exporting if given the opportunity.

He ended the interview by sharing his views on the facilities provided by the government in assisting local for developing business.

"Local must utilise and take advantage on the opportunities provided by the government.

This will assist in realising His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam's vision in developing local enterprises/business in producing local product and not depending on export," he said.

Jet Ski motor is one of the products produced by the enterprise.

