

Milking tips from Dutch farmers

Visitors from the Netherlands share their knowledge with dairy farmers in Tapah

IPOH

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DUTCH dairy farming has inspired Asnol Hadi Johan to increase the number of cows he has from 60 to 150.

The 50-year-old owner of Mega Ternak Sdn Bhd is one of the 30 dairy farmers from Perak who was given the rare opportunity to get one-on-one training from a Dutch farmer.

Aad Kester, who hails from Langbroek in the Netherlands, said that Asnol is capable of rearing 150 cows on his 40-hectare farm if he manages the place well.

"Our farm is capable but I am giving myself three to five years to increase the number of cows," Asnol said.

He said he has been part of the Farmer2Farmer Programme for two years and it has improved his management skills.

The programme helps Malaysian farmers to select the right food for their cows, manage



Kester says the dairy farms here remind him of how his grandfather used to farm.

their farms in an efficient manner and improve the health of the cows.

"Last year, they came and gave us valuable pointers.

"Since then, quality and quantity of milk has improved but more than that, our farm management has improved.

"Even though there are only four of us, we are doing pretty well and producing 15,000 litres of milk per month," he said.



Feeding time at Megaternak farm in Tapah, Perak. The Farmer2Farmer Programme has helped Malaysian dairy farmers to select the right food for their cows, manage their farms in an efficient manner and improve the health of the cows.



Ramachandran says one challenge faced by local farmers is land and hopes more land will be allocated

Kester, who is in Malaysia for the first time, was impressed with Asnol's barn and praised his ingenuity in ensuring that the cows are comfortable.

"The difference between the weather in Netherlands and Malaysia is huge.

"It is very warm in here but Asnol has placed many fans to make sure that the cows are comfortable," he said.

However, the Dutch farms are more advanced than the Malaysian farms.

"This farm reminds me of how my grandfather used to farm.

"Farmers here need to work on their technique and knowledge on farming.

"This programme is about sharing knowledge and experience to help each other to improve," said Kester, whose 45-hectare farm produces 700,000 litres of milk per year.

Initiated by Dutch Lady Milk Industries Bhd, the Farmer2Farmer Programme has three Dutch farmers spending five days, between March 29 and April 2, at local farms to share their best practices and knowledge with local farmers to improve their farming skills.

The programme, which is a collaboration with the Veterinary Service Department and the Embassy of the Netherlands, is being held for the third time.

The programme focuses on good farm management, milking practices, feeding programmes, breeding programmes, hoof care and hygiene management.

The production of milk by those who participated in previous programmes experienced an increase of 6% in 2014 compared to 2013 and a 25% increase last year.

The national requirement for liquid milk is about 50 million litres per year, with 34 million litres produced in Malaysia while



Kester taking a peek into a milk collection tank at Megaternak Farm as Ching looks on.

the rest are imported. Having taken part in the programme twice, Koperasi Tenusu Perak chairman K. Ramachandran said he has learnt a lot from the Dutch farmers that have over 140 years of dairy farming experience.

"The animals are better managed in terms of their overall well-being.

"We also learned better book-keeping and administrative work," he said, adding that he has about 50 cows in his farm in Kuala Kangsar.

"My farm is producing 400 litres of milk from between 25 and 30 cows daily," he said.

Ramachandran said there are about 100 registered farmers with the cooperative.

"Overall, I think there are about 200 farms in the state - some are privately owned.

"For the 100 registered farmers, they can produce between 170,000 and 180,000 litres of milk monthly," he said.

Ramachandran said one challenge faced by local farmers was land.

"Even with a small plot of land, we can produce lots of milk.

"However, if more land is allocated to farmers, we can produce and contribute even more milk to the national requirement," he said.

He also encouraged youngsters, who have graduated from agricultural science, to venture into dairy farming.

"There's so much potential in the industry even though it's not a white-collar job.

"There is demand for milk with very lucrative returns," he said, adding that he could get between RM15,000 and RM17,000 per month.



Kester praised the operator of Megaternak farm for placing fans in the barns to keep the cows comfortable in the hot weather.



Dairy farmers delivering their fresh milk to the Department of Veterinary Services collection centre in Tapah.

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