

t the dewan rakyat

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RM45bil for food import bill

Amount is RM18bil higher than export tag, says Shabery

MALAYSIA is still heavily reliant on imports to feed the population, despite efforts to be more self-sustainable in the near future.

Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek said Malaysia's food import bill was RM45.39bil last year.

"In the same year, our food export was only RM27bil, so the efforts to reduce the RM18bil deficit is a huge responsibility for the Government," he said in reply to Datuk Abd Aziz Sheikh Fadzir (BN-Kulim Bandar Baru).

Ahmad Shabery said that the burden was particularly heavy on poultry and meat farmers, who had to rely on imports for animal feed.

"Animal feed, poultry and meat

Animal feed, poultry and meat imports alone amount to RM5bil a year on average.

Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek

imports alone amount to RM5bil a year on average.

"And some of the produce are controlled items, such as chicken, therefore the prices cannot be increased either," Ahmad Shabery added.

Ahmad Shabery, however, said self-sufficiency was something the

Government had been aiming at for some time, and that once the level was achieved, it could eventually lead to food sovereignty.

"We are already self-sufficient in some foods, such as rice, where we produce 70% of the population's needs.

"It is the same with chicken and fish, but where meat and milk are concerned, we can only afford to produce 20% of the population's needs so far," he said.

On a suggestion by Abd Aziz to utilise about 120,000ha of idle land in the country to help with food production, Ahmad Shabery said that an integrated programme involving all relevant agencies was necessary.

Later, on the current hot weather

affecting crop production, Ahmad Shabery said contingency plans were in place.

"Fish may go north, while certain plantations will be affected, and we are worried if this will be coupled with the haze.

"We have contingency plans such as pumps in strategic locations to absorb water for certain crops," Ahmad Shabery said at the Parliament lobby.

A percentage of crops will be affected because of the haze, he said, and farmers were worried about less profitable yields.

"We are adding RM50 as extra income for every tonne of rice our farmers produce.

"This is to balance out the current situation," he said.