



Yahya (second right) receives a token of appreciation from Dr Mohd Harun



Yahya stops to read displays at one of the booths at the conference

People need to know importance of sustainable agri practices

NST 25.10.2016 2
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SANDAKAN: The State government wants academicians and experts to help enlighten people in Sabah on the importance of sustainable agricultural practices to attain self-suf-

iciency level (SSL) in food production and therefore allay fears among landowners whose property may be acquired for infrastructural development. Deputy Chief Minister, Datuk Yahya Hussin said building infrastructure such as drains

and irrigations was crucial in ensuring sustainable food production but these may necessitate acquiring private land. Fully grasping the importance of sustainability and attaining self-sufficiency level in food production would make

the affected landowners appreciate the necessity for building infrastructure that is vital to agriculture. Yahya was speaking at the "Regional Conference on Sustainable Agriculture" organised by the Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) at the university's Sandakan Campus at Mile 10 on Monday. Sabah still needs to increase the production of rice in order to reach SSL especially in view of the growing population. Yahya said this meant adopting a sustainable practice such as the "System of Rice Intensification" and enhancing drainage & irrigation systems. An example is the upgrading of drainage & irrigation in Kota Belud for paddy cultivation that was implemented in 2010 at a cost of RM42.9 million. It has enabled farmers to plant paddy twice a year with an

estimated production of 55,080 metric tonnes a year. Meanwhile Yahya, who is also the Minister of Agriculture & Food Industry, pointed out that climate change had required effective management of land and water resources for sustainable food production. Exhaustive planning and methods were necessary to adapt to climate change which caused extraordinary flooding and droughts. "A system of conserving agriculture soil fertility and efficient irrigation also play an important role," he said. According to the Food & Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, more than 40 per cent of the increase in agriculture output came from areas provided with an irrigation & drainage system. "This requires creativity and innovation towards knowledge, technology, policies and exist-

ing agriculture management," he added. Yahya urged researchers in UMS to conduct studies that would help boost the agricultural sector in Sabah and formulate innovative ideas that increase the production of bananas, pineapples and other food crops for viable export. He said ideas and technology could be focused on, among others, in the areas of agronomy, agriculture mechanisation, irrigation system, aquaculture and livestock breeding. He assured that his ministry was always ready to work with the university and requested UMS to assist by conducting refresher courses for the ministry's officers and sharing knowledge. Also present at the event on Monday were UMS vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah and the faculty's dean Prof Dr Wan Mohamad Wan Othman.