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KEBUN KITA(R): PENANG'S FIRST SELF-SUSTAINING URBAN FARM OPENS AT PENANG DIGITAL LIBRARY

GEORGE TOWN, PENANG, Monday September 14, 2020: Kebun Kita(r), Penang's first self-sustaining community urban farm launched by the Penang State Government in partnership with Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSII) and Think City, opened its doors to the public today.

Located at the Penang Digital Library, the objectives of Kebun Kita(r) include educating communities on nutrition and food security, providing skills for urban farming, feeding underprivileged communities with harvests and developing opportunities for community building, entrepreneurship and employment. The urban farm will also serve as an active site for capacity building and research, and act as a demonstrative showcase of closed-loop urban farming with digital processes from production through to harvest and distribution.

Featuring state-of-the-art smart technologies with vertical hydroponic and automated irrigation systems developed by UPSII, 60% of harvests will be channelled via Think City's *Kita 2 Kita* (K2K) digital platform to underprivileged communities in Penang. Each harvest is able to feed up to 400 households. Meanwhile, the remaining 40% of harvests will be sold to the general public to cover operational costs.

The name Kebun Kita(r) is a combination of the Bahasa Melayu words '*kebun*' meaning 'farm', with a twist on the words '*kita*' and '*kitar*', meaning 'ours' and 'recycle', respectively, to reflect the closed-loop, zero-waste nature of the farm.

Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Managing Director of Think City said that urban farming was a crucial aspect of the future as the benefits to society were manifold.

"We live in uncertain times and witnessed the effects of disruption most acutely with the Covid-19 pandemic. We may yet encounter challenges such as interruptions to supply chains, loss of employment, and movement restrictions. A sustainable urban farming movement can enable communities to grow food independently, and potentially provide opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship and social cohesion," he said.

"It is our collective hope that the farm will enable capacity-building that will give rise to more agrotechpreneurs, encouraging young people to delve into this industry. It is also an opportunity for existing farmers to grow their businesses and break out of the B40 community.



“The farm is a positive extension of Think City’s ‘Kita to Kita’ (K2K) programme utilising a digital platform to capture, analyse data and develop interventions that can improve the quality of life and wellbeing of the B40 communities. In this case, K2K will be used to register, track and distribute produce to B40 households. As a tried and tested pilot project, there are also opportunities to replicate the Kebun Kita(r) model in other locations in Penang, or other cities nationwide,” he added.

YB Jagdeep Singh Deo, Executive Councillor, Local Government, Housing and Town & Country Planning spoke at the launch, saying that the state initiative in urban farming would not only create income-generating opportunities, it would enable the ‘*rakyat*’ to enjoy organic vegetables.

“Using the popular methods of vertical farming and aquaponics, urban farms enjoy greater production capacities without requiring much urban space. Additionally, in alignment with Penang’s journey towards being a Smart state, UPSI utilised Internet-of-Things (IOT) technology to develop a system to monitor and manage the farm, with the view of converting the conventional community farm model to a smart, circular farm model,” he said.

“With technology and a stable infrastructure as well as broadband internet, urban farming no longer requires hard labour, but rather can be executed with a tap of the finger, and this is aligned with the Penang 2030 vision of establishing varied and modern systems in agriculture.

“Apart from community farming, an *Economical Food Waste Composter* (EFWC) will convert food waste from Cafe Love A Loaf, the onsite cafe, and the nearby Penang Free School canteen, into fertiliser for cultivation on the farm. This is how Kebun Kita(r) gets its name - by virtue of its zero-waste processes,” he added.

Officiating at the launch of Kebun Kita(r), YAB Tuan Chow Kon Yeow, Chief Minister of Penang, said that it was encouraging to see a project that encompassed so many aspects of nation-building simultaneously in one package.

“Beyond food security, Kebun Kita(r) is proof that Public-Private-People Partnerships - where institutions, federal-owned or private organisations and the state are working together - can yield positive results.

It is also an inspirational example of IR 4.0, where existing and new systems work seamlessly to deliver great benefits to society. It shows that academic institutions can contribute significantly to Malaysia’s Industry 4.0 journey and benefit on-ground projects that can impact communities positively,” he said.

“This urban farm is powered by two innovative digital platforms - Kebun Kita(r) with its digital process from production to harvest developed by UPSI, and Think City’s K2K digital platform to facilitate the transparent, accountable and auditable distribution of food to underprivileged communities.”



“The farm will act as a prototype to draw up state-level policy around converting or repurposing underutilised, vacant or state and local council-owned spaces into food fields to feed the *rakyat* with safe and nutritious food. Organic food will no longer be a luxury but can be enjoyed by all,” he emphasised.

“The future of Penang is reliant on initiatives such as this which can move us towards the Penang 2030 vision of being a family-oriented, green and smart state which will inspire the nation.”

Kebun Kita(r), a 2,000-square foot farm at the Penang Digital Library has a unique model with a fully self-sustaining model, enhanced by Smart systems, which incorporate mixed technology, including automated irrigation, vertical hydroponics, as well as solar panels for energy, rainwater harvesting and a comprehensive zero-waste management system. With an initial investment of RM50,000, the farm will channel 60% of produce to B40 communities while the remaining 40% will be commercialised to support operational sustainability. It was developed with land provided by the Penang state government, with funding by Think City, and technical support, farm design and expertise by UPSI. Think City’s K2K digital platform will facilitate the seamless distribution of the produce to lower-income families.

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