Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang
Consumers Association of Penang
槟城消费人协会 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Speech by Mr. S. M. Mohamed Idris, President of Consumers' Association of Penang on 26 May 2016 in Penang

Chemical-Free Sustainable Farming is the Way Forward
Yang Berbahagia Dato' Ahmad Zakaria bin Mohamad Sidek
Ketua Pengarah Jabatan Pertanian Malaysia

Encik Azahar bin Haji Ibrahim
Pengarah Jabatan Pertanian Negeri Pulau Pinang

Saudara-saudari sekalian.

Izinkan saya meneruskan ucapan ini dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

I deeply appreciate everyone present here today for sparing your time to join us in welcoming the Director General of Agriculture's visit to learn about CAP's sustainable farming project.

We thank all teachers, students, farmers from Penang, Kedah and Perak who are here today and who have been actively involved in CAP's sustainable farming projects all these years. We also have strong support from the public and media who has been highlighting our farming ventures. Thank you all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our current system of industrial agriculture and pest control relies heavily on chemical inputs. Science shows that even at low levels of exposure, many of these chemicals are harmful to human health especially on children as their developing minds and bodies are particularly vulnerable.

A study by Pimentel, updated in 2005 estimated USD10 billion per year in environmental and societal damages due to the application of pesticides in the USA. The breakdown is as follows: USD1.1 billion per year in public health costs; USD1.5 billion per year in pesticide resistance; USD1.4 billion per year in crop losses; USD 2.2 billion per year in bird losses; and USD 2.0 billion per year in groundwater contamination. We do not have the costs for Malaysia but the damage shown through these figures reflects the graveness of the situation.

From CAP's ventures, and experience of small-scale farmers it is increasingly clear that chemical-free approaches to farming are not only viable, but would strengthen the resilience of agricultural production. We have demonstrated that yields can be increased sustainably, promote food safety and food security, improve livelihoods and successfully decrease or refrain from using agro-chemical inputs.

CAP has also been actively promoting urban farming or kitchen gardening among households. Vegetables and herbs grown in simple containers can help families meet their needs for fresh and nutritious produce which are free of chemical residues and also reduced their food expenses. This can be integrated with rainwater harvesting and composting of garden and kitchen organic waste.

CAP's school garden projects have raised students' awareness of the importance of food production and provided them with training in agriculture, practical nutrition education and also marketing of their produce. Our intention is to inculcate among children and youth that agriculture is a viable career path.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The old paradigm of industrial, energy-intensive and toxic agriculture is a concept of the past. Our natural resources such as soil, and agro-biodiversity have been degraded or lost and in some cases irreversibly. Meanwhile, climate change is already leaving its mark in the agriculture sector, and will do so on a much greater scale in the future.

These realities all call for specific responses at the policy level. Small-scale farming and agro-ecological methods provide the way forward to provide food security, avert food crisis and meet our needs.

Malaysia must have high targets and strategic plans for the country. For example Bolivia aims to become entirely self-sufficient in food production by 2020 by enhancing local capacities. The Government of Bolivia has allocated funds to support farmers in sustainable food production and invest in food security projects. The intention is also to reduce or halt food imports which would not only help improve livelihoods of local farmers and businesses, but help cut down emissions.

Other examples include the tiny mountain nation of Bhutan which announced in 2011 its goal to make the country's agricultural system 100 percent organic by the year 2020. The Danish government is also working in multiple ways to convert the entire country's agriculture into organic and sustainable farming. In 2015, they released an ambitious plan to double organic farming, and to serve more organic food in the nation's public institutions by 2020. Sikkim in India is now a 100% organic state, with no chemical pesticides or fertilizers and no GMOs. This shows that organic food in an entire region is possible.

Hence we call upon the Malaysian government to implement strong policies and programmes for chemical-free sustainable farming. Chemical-free farming should be made a compulsory subject in all vocational schools. UPM and other universities in Malaysia should introduce courses on agriculture, focussing on chemical-free farming methods. Ministry of Agriculture should supply tools and other related material for those interested in chemical-free farming. Such incentives will trigger more people into setting their own vegetable garden.

At the moment CAP is teaching chemical-free farming methods to public and producing compost, vermicompost, growth promoters and pest repellent which are toxic-free. We encourage public to learn and practise such methods in their own gardens and farms. Chemical-free farm input are also available at CAP. Funds should also be allocated to groups such as CAP who can assist in moving the plans forward.

S. M. Mohamed Idris
President
Consumers Association of Penang

Reference:
Pimentel, D. (2005). "Environmental and Economic Costs of the Application of Pesticides Primarily in the United States", 7: 229-252. Available at:
http://www.beyondpesticides.org/documents/pimentel.pesticides.2005update.pdf