

<p>2009/04/01</p><p></p><p align="justify"><em>Professor Dr Fatimah Mohamed Arshad Universiti Putra Malaysia's Institute of Agriculture and Food Policy Studies director </em></p><p align="justify">KUALA LUMPUR: Traders, especially wholesalers, are dictating prices because the agriculture sector has not been given attention and the country has to rely on imported food. </p><p align="justify">Universiti Putra Malaysia's Institute of Agriculture and Food Policy Studies director Professor Dr Fatimah Mohamed Arshad said this was why food prices here were high. </p> "Agriculture has had to shrink to make way for industrialisation, and its slow growth is partly due to policy neglect. Even the target of making agriculture the third engine of growth has not materialised." <p align="justify">Fatimah delivered the keynote address at a round-table discussion on food prices and security. It was organised by the Consumer Research and Resource Centre and Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations.</p><p align="justify">She said the lack of research and development to mechanise and improve productivity in farms had also contributed to the rising cost of food.</p><p align="justify">"We have all the resources to grow poultry, vegetables and fruits and this gives us an advantage in the world market. Malaysia is also an importer of food input like seeds, fertiliser, day-old chicks, corn and chemicals. This is why our food sector has not developed. Consumers are paying to support the industry." </p><p align="justify">Fatimah said the uncertain and irregular supply also forced traders to raise prices to prepare for potential losses. </p><p align="justify">She added that Malaysia had advantages in the production of poultry, fruits, vegetables and cocoa-based products.</p><p align="justify">"We have a variety of these. It may be difficult to compete with New Zealand and Australia for dairy products, but we can sustain our food industry's growth." </p><p align="justify">Malaysia's efforts to cope with the food crisis last year, she said, were commendable, with frequent price checks, subsidised rice, fish and fuel and the protection of poor consumers. </p><p align="justify">Source: <a href="http://www.nst.com.my/Current\_News/NST/Wednesday/National/2520300/Article/index\_html">http://www.nst.com.my/Current\_News/NST/Wednesday/National/2520300/Article/index\_html</a></p>