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TASEK GELUGOR: Help is in sight for farmers and livestock breeders who have suffered hefty losses over the years because of natural disasters or disease.

Agricultural and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Noh Omar said an agricultural insurance scheme was under consideration to cushion the impact when crops were destroyed or livestock had to be put down because of disease.

A pilot project involving padi planters in Kedah and chicken breeders in Johor will be introduced soon.

Agro Bank and a consultant have been tasked with researching a suitable mechanism, and the pilot scheme will be evaluated before it is expanded.

"We must take into consideration affordable premiums, how much subsidy the government must inject, whether or not the insurance scheme should be compulsory and many other things," he said after opening the ministry's Plantation Month at Sungai Dua yesterday.

Noh, who took over the ministry from Datuk Mustapa Mohamed following last week's cabinet reshuffle, said as a former Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development minister, one of his top priorities would be to nurture entrepreneurship skills in the agricultural community.

He said many Malaysian products, in particular agro-commodities, were sought after in overseas markets but the stumbling block was concern over the ability to meet bulk orders.

He said he planned to carry out a thorough "house cleaning" of the ministry's 13 agencies to

improve the delivery system.

"There is a missing link between farm output and end product manufacturers as well as between the agencies and the farmers."

He plans to push for more inter-agency cooperation to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

"We want to make sure all federal government allocations go straight to the target group."

He said that the Federal Agricultural Marketing Board would receive immediate attention to improve its role in purchasing and marketing agro-products.

Source: http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Monday/National/2530256/Article/index_html