

Funds for rice top wish list



Tan Sri George Chan (right) and chief statistician of Malaysia Wan Ramlah Wan Abd Raof and secretary of the Apcas Commission Dr Jairo Castano looking at a biofuel sample at the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics meeting in Kuching.

KUCHING: One item on Sarawak's wish list for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi when he arrives today for a one-day working visit is funds for the rice-growing programme in the state.

Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr George Chan said the money would be for infrastructure and to reward the farmers.

Speaking after declaring open the 22nd session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (Apcas) here yesterday, Dr Chan did not disclose the amount needed.

"It is expensive to build roads, canals and and irrigation network and we cannot leave that to farmers or entrepreneurs who want to go into rice-growing," said Dr Chan, also the state's minister for modernisation of agriculture.

He said a "reward" for rice farmers was also necessary as it was cheaper and more lucrative to go into other agriculture businesses, such as cultivating oil palm, fruits and rubber trees. Meanwhile, the chief statistician of Malaysia, Wan Ramlah Wan Abdul Raof, in her opening remarks, said it was prudent for the government to monitor the production and productivity of agricultural products to avoid a shortfall.

She said steps had been taken by the Statistics Department, together with the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry and Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministries, to develop a database of agricultural statistics, which could be shared with other government agencies.

Fifty-five delegates from 15-member countries are attending the Apcas meeting.