

Chapter 8

Agropreneurship Among Gen Y in Malaysia: The Role of Academic Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Despite great concerns regarding food security and the need to maintain a continuous food supply for an ever-increasing population, the agriculture sector remains an unattractive employment option, especially among younger generations. The big question is, “who should play a greater role in giving this sector young talents that are needed for successful agriculture and how it should it be acquired? Research has shown that this sector is dominated by an aging community of farmers who lack the innovative skills that is needed for running a new and modern agricultural industry. This chapter provides a brief overview of the importance of the agriculture sector and agropreneurship and is followed by why the involvement of the Gen Y segment is crucial for the growth and development of this sector. Since the basis for agropreneurship development among today’s youth is based on training and inculcating an agropreneurship work culture at the university level, the authors proposed roles an academic institution could play in instilling positive an agropreneurial attitude among Gen Y graduates.

AGRICULTURE SECTOR AND WHY IT MATTERS?

In many parts of developing world, agriculture production is recognized as a strategy to improve a nation’s standard of living, particularly to increase income, reduce hunger, and contribute to the improvement of other measures of well-being (Owens, Hoddinott, & Kinsey, 2003). Agriculture is also acknowledged to contribute significantly to economic growth in many countries (Bairwa, Lakra, Kushwaha, Meena, &

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9621-9.ch008

Kumar, 2014; Diao, Hazell, Resnick, & Thurlow, 2007; Razak et al., 2015). Furthermore, agricultural growth is seen as precursor to the industrial revolutions that spread across the temperate world, from England in the mid-18th century to Japan in the late 19th century. Higher agricultural productivity that generates an agricultural surplus open to partial taxation and is used to finance industrial development as well as enabling lower food prices for the masses underpinned the success stories of industrial and structural transformation.

Agriculture also plays a substantial role in providing employment opportunity and poverty reduction. It accounts for 32 percent of total employment globally and 39 percent of employment in developing countries of Asia and the Pacific (International Labour Office, 2014). The sector has been acknowledged to be a major contributor to poverty reduction, as is found in countries such as Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Tunisia and, not forgotten, Malaysia (Cervantes-Godoy & Dewbre, 2010) among others in Asia and the Pacific (International Labour Office, 2014; Kuldilok, Dawson, & Lingard, 2013). Similar scenario is also seen in many developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia, where agriculture sector does not only play a significant role in contributing the countries' food supplies but also provides other benefits such as improved physical and mental health, improved aesthetics, community building, employment opportunities, improved local land prices, and etc. (Mok et al., 2014).

On reflection, agriculture today is no longer a sector for poor people only. For instance, Thailand has gained its competitive advantage by dominating world exports of canned tuna with a market share of around 40 percent, which is at least four times higher than any other exporter (Kuldilok et al., 2013). Many other developing countries have benefited from agriculture not only to have sufficient food to maintain normal health for a growing population but also to increase the nation's economic standing (Bairwa et al., 2014; Diao et al., 2007; Razak et al., 2015). There seems to be no compelling reason to argue for the economically inferior state of agriculture sector in shaping the country's economic condition. With agribusiness' increasing technological sophistication, as is found in developed countries, agriculture can appeal to younger generations.

OVERVIEW OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN MALAYSIA

For many years, agriculture sector has been standing high as the backbone of Malaysian economy through the production of agricultural products for domestic consumption and also as the earner of foreign exchange (Abu Dardak, 2015). Agriculture plays an important role in the development of the Malaysia's economy including providing employment opportunity, uplifting the income of the populations and ensuring national food security (Siwar, Yasar, Ghazali, & Mohd Idris, 2013). Since its independence in 1957, agriculture has become a significant contributor to Malaysia's economy. For example, agriculture has contributed 38 percent of the country's GDP in 1960 as compared to 9 percent contributed by the manufacturing sector in the same year. In mid-1980s however, agriculture contribution to GDP has declined significantly due to the slow growth in the production of commodity and fluctuations in agricultural commodity prices (Selamat & Nasir, 2013). The declining trend keeps on continuing for decades. Even though it went up to 10.09 percent in 2010, it went back down for years after (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2016). Despite this unstable trend faced by Malaysia, the country has observed an increased in total agriculture value added from RM18.7 billion in 2000 to RM21.6 billion in 2005. Albeit the performance of Malaysian economy experienced a rapid growth where the GDP has increased from RM11.8

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