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Growing Malaysia's food future in the classroom

COULD a plate of nasi lemak spark a student's interest in science or inspire a future entrepreneur? Behind its familiar ingredients are questions students can investigate: How do we grow better crops, use water wisely, and get fresh food to market?

Tomorrow's growers, agricultural technology technicians, and agricultural entrepreneurs are sitting in our classrooms today.

To reach them, schools must make practical agricultural learning a core part of the curriculum, helping Gen Alpha connect food production with science, technology, and entrepreneurship.

Agricultural learning could even begin in preschool, with curiosity sparked by watching a seed sprout, and pride encouraged in harvesting something students have grown themselves.

Imagine a science class turning a vegetable plot into a term-long experiment. Could a simple watering system reduce water use while keeping plants healthy? Would mulch help soil retain moisture? Students could compare growing conditions, monitor plant health, and keep a photo diary from sowing to harvest.

Even a failed crop offers a lesson. When plants wither, students can investigate why and hypothesise solutions. A disappointing harvest can still yield valuable scientific learning if assessments reward careful record-keeping and teamwork over perfect results.

The same farming plot could serve several subjects. Mathematics could help students calculate germination rates and yields. Design and technology classes could develop the watering system, while business and accounting activities could examine expenses, selling prices, and profit.

Schools with limited outdoor space can utilise container gardening or vertical hydroponic systems.

Projects should start small, with adequate resources and clear arrangements for plant care during school holidays so that they remain manageable for teachers.

Classes could also follow a familiar ingredient from producer to market, and examine how food reaches consumers.



Little growers: Primary school pupils in China learning how padi grows from a farmer. — China Daily/Asia News Network

Visits to farms using modern technology could introduce students to sensors, automated irrigation, and drones.

Conversations with growers could help them understand how these tools solve practical problems, what they cost, and the skills needed to use them.

Malaysia's food future needs more than land. It needs young people who see agriculture not only as hard labour in the sun, but also as skilled work with room for invention, entrepreneurship, and a decent living.

Schools can help bring about that shift one growing project, farm visit, or conversation with a grower at a time.

Not every student who plants a seed will become a farmer. But the next time they sit down to nasi lemak, some may see more than a meal. They may see a future they want to help grow.

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