Quality and Safety of Agri-Foods in Malaysia

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Abstract
Agriculture remains an important sector of Malaysia's economy, contributing 12% to the national GDP and providing employment for 16% of the population. Food crops such as paddy, vegetables and fruits amounted up to 16% of total agriculture land. The quality of agriculture foods in Malaysia is given great emphasis in the current years. Agropolitan, the plan under the East Coast Economic Region (ECER), is thought to serve as a hub providing quality seed to good agriculture practices and business mentoring, which is expected to enhance industry practices increase yield and supplement income stream. The quality of Agri-food in Malaysia is maintained through certification, standardization and quality assurance. Quality assurance is the key to consumer confidence in both domestic and export markets. Currently, the challenge faced by Malaysia is the lack of an internationally recognized Agriculture Standard. It is recommended that government, with the aid of industry Councils, create an independent quality assurance body with widely acceptable global standards. The safety of agriculture food in Malaysia is currently upheld through co-operation between the food quality control Division, Ministry of Health, as the lead agency for food safety and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Veterinary Services, Ministry of Agriculture, and Agro-based industries. The policies and programmes on food safety are generally science based to promote confidence through tangible evidence. The National Food Safety Policy endorsed by the National Food Safety and Nutrition Council 2001 has identified several key elements including education on food safety and gathering of scientific information and analysis which can contribute towards strengthening the nation's food safety programme and to create a society of well-informed consumers.

INTRODUCTION
In recent years the issue of food safety and quality have pushed governments all over the world to shape national frameworks and policies to ensure food production fulfils the demands for safer and high quality food products. Global trends of food safety quality have seen the establishment of standards such as the EU White Paper and the FAO standards. Malaysia, though working towards becoming an industrialized nation, is still an agricultural country. The importance of agriculture was cemented under the National Agricultural Policy (NAP) where the government recognized agriculture as the 3rd engine of growth (MOA, 1999). Agricultural food production contributes to approximately 40% of the overall agricultural contribution to the country's GDP. Production of major food crops such as padi, fruits and vegetables have been projected to increase 2 folds from 2005 to 2010 (MOA, 2005). In order for Malaysia to keep up with both the domestic and international demands for safer food products, a number of principle policies and strategies have been established which will be reviewed in this paper.

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY CONTROL SYSTEM: GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES
Food safety and quality control in Malaysia is under the principle purview of the Ministry of Health. However, the Malaysian food safety system operates by entrusting