

Michael and Jaire showing the signed MoU. Eucalyptus Pellita trees for 20,000ha in Pitas

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PITAS: Kampung Mangkapon Darat folks here can now utilise the 20,000 hectares of land in the village for the planting of Eucalyptus Pellita trees under the Community Forestry Programme.

Pitas Assemblyman Datuk Bolkiah Ismail said the land was given by Sabah Forestry Development Authority (Safoda) to the villagers in 1994 but had yet to be developed.

"The programme is in line with the government's efforts to reduce poverty rate among the people especially in rural areas," he said when witnessing the joint-venture agreement signing ceremony between Safoda and Acacia Forest Industries (AFI) at Kampung Bongkol.

The Community Forestry Programme is a joint-venture effort between AFI, Safoda and villagers of Kampung Mangkapon Darat.

"I was made to understand that AFI and 15 villagers are currently planting Eucalyptus Pellita trees which will mature between eight and 10 years."

The participants, he said, need not fork out their own capital for the programme as all expenses including land clearing, seeds, fertilisers and consultation are funded by AFI.

"The programme will provide a long-term solution for the villagers whose financial resources are limited and it could also help them to developed their abandoned land," he said.

To this end, he reminded the villagers to take full advantage of the opportunity and help AFI achieve the common aim.

AFI general manager Michael Janssen said the programme's main aim is to provide an alternative income source for the communities in Bengkoka.

"It will not only complement the local economy but also help to build relationship between the company and the people.

"AFI is committed to extend the programme to non-Safoda owned lands in Bengkoka," he said.

The joint-venture programme will help the communities learn tree-planting skill on their own land, and most importantly, it will create awareness on the importance of forestation.

Jaire Magandun, one of the involved villagers, is confident that the programme will benefit its participants, in terms of income and knowledge.

Also present were Safoda Board of Directors' chairman Datuk Dr Lucas Umbal, AFI Board of Directors' members Geoffrey Seeto, Paul Speed, Zainal Saridi, and Safoda regional manager (Bengkoka).

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