

Vice Minister of Agriculture: Most Indonesian Farmers are Old

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YOGYAKARTA - Low agricultural productivity of food and horticulture is marked by the declining number of workers in this sector. This is because becoming farmers are less appealing to the younger generation. As a result, the majority of farmers today are the non-productive ones. "Our farmers averagely are in old age, 45-60 years," Vice Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Rusman Heriawan, said in Managing Agro-forestry workshop conducted by RCE UGM, Tuesday (2/10).

Many young people are not interested in working in the farm as the image of farmer is negative with the limited land and low productivity. According to Rusman, the mechanization of agriculture is needed for attracting the young people to develop agriculture. The vice minister proposes that farmers can wear certain uniforms so that they are proud of their profession. "Japanese farmers' uniform is like workshop uniform. We have to improve our farmers' outfit," he said.

But the government also needs to improve infrastructures, such as irrigation dams, which are more than 50% are now damaged. "In many places, conflict between farmers occurs when there is no sufficient water provision," he said.

The vice minister admitted, the contribution of agriculture in the provision of job is still quite large. It could absorb 33% of 120 million jobs in Indonesia. "Of 100 working people, 33 work in agriculture," he said.

However, the contribution of agriculture in employment and national gross domestic income is declining as compared to 40 years ago. According to Rusman, in 1970 approximately 64% people work in the agricultural sector, contributing 53% to GDP. Current employment is only 33% and 14.72 percent to the GDP. "Its contribution is smaller. But the trade of plantation products is still surplus, but not for food and horticulture," he said.



Dean of Biology Faculty UGM, Dr. Retno Peni Sancayaningsih, said government's concern to farmers in the form of semi-mechanical equipment facility is still minimal. However, mostly poor people still live in rural areas as farmers. "Surely, the government will not be able to develop foreign investment for agriculture if infrastructure support is not addressed," he concluded.

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