

UGM Researching Tubers as Wheat Alternative

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YOGYAKARTA - It is predicted that demands of wheat is increasing along with the increasing population and globalisation of world food trade. The problem is that Indonesia cannot yet produce wheat commercially whilst food diversification has not been implemented well. This has caused the increase in the number of imported wheat from 7.4 m tonnes in 2010-2011 to 7.8 in 2011-2012.

The problem poses a concern for Prof. Dr.Ir. Eni Harmayani, M.Sc., researcher from Universitas Gadjah Mada's Centre for Food and Nutrition Studies. She said development of tubers as local food is hoped to be able to reduce imported wheat. There is a problem, however, that the people believe that tubers are a second-class food, hence discouraging interest. Eni said, "Tubers development as functional food can increase the position of tubers," on Tuesday (27/1) in conjunction with the Nutrition and Food Day on 25 January.

She explained various applications of tubers can be an alternative food source at a high value. They can be made into bakery, snack, biscuit, noodle, meatball, porridge, sausage, nugget, as well as emulsifier or filler. She further explained the high potential of applications of local tubers for various food products. Hence, this requires synergy between suppliers, technology, and government.

She criticised the lack of government's support to farmers, i.e. no incentives for those who prefer to grow local crops. She also explained the potential of tubers such as *garut*, cassava, *ganyong*, *gembili*, and sweet potatoes as functional food as they have prebiotic contents to improve digestive and immune system.



Head of the Centre, Prof. Dr. Umar Santoso, said his office was researching various tubers from across Indonesia to be made alternatives to wheat. "These can be directed to substitute wheat," he said.

Umar said the government needs to encourage farmers to start planting local crops with incentives such as subsidies. The people will also be asked to consume local foods through food diversification, hence investors and industry are attracted to follow suit. Umar further believes if the government can take a firm stance in stopping wheat imports, the industry will shift to tubers, too.

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