

The seaweed industry in Sabah, east Malaysia

Abstract

Seaweed cultivation was introduced in Sabah since 1978 and has increasingly become an economically important natural resource for Malaysia, particularly for Sabah. It was known to have wide application potentials similar or even better than other commodity such as cocoa and palm oil. Two significant seaweed-based industries had started and are developing at a moderate pace. These are seaweed cultivation or farming and the production of semi refined carragenan from seaweed. Beside the government agencies focusing on socio-economy development for rural peoples, there are private local companies venturing in seaweed processing and cultivation at larger scale in Semporna. Three methods of seaweed cultivation have been widely practiced and established in Sabah namely, raft system (MKII), stake system and long line system. The long line system is being widely practiced with approximately 95% of seaweed farmers employing this method. This was due to the facts that the long line system is more economical and practically easy to handle compared to other system. *Kappaphycus alvarezii* is the most common species and widely farmed in Sabah beside *Euchema spinosom* in small percentage. Sabah is the sole producer for seaweed in Malaysia. GDP in year 2002 was RM21.16 Billion whereby fisheries sector contributed 3.2% of the total GDP. Total production of dried seaweed in 2002 was 2,562.49 MT with the total wholesale value approximately RM 4.4 million. Total export for dried seaweed from Sabah in 2002 was 1,750 MT by weight and RM14 million by value. Most of dried seaweed production in 2002 exported to the United Kingdom (65.5%), Chile (13.0%), Korea (8.0%), Japan (6.0%) and other countries (7.5%). The main issues and challenges facing the seaweed industry in Sabah in particular and in Malaysia in general will be discussed in this paper. Major programmes are in placed to boost the seaweed production in Sabah, subsequently to meet projected production of seaweed in Malaysia in the year 2010 also will be highlighted.