

Malaysia's food supply is on track

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IN the post-independence era, Malaysia has never experienced a disruption in its necessities and food supply. There may have been isolated cases of such incidents, but the duration has been short and it could be resolved immediately.

However, the situation would have been different during the World Wars, or during the Japanese Occupation, as life at that point of time was very difficult for everyone.

While public concern on the shortage of food supply is understandable, the issue however is unfounded. The country is blessed with fertile soil and large tracts of land, with a balance of rainy and hot weather. We are truly blessed with a conducive and favourable natural environment, weather, soil, and resources to be able to produce a wide range of food.

That is how fortunate Malaysia is.

Panic buying especially to ensure that supplies reach buyers and consumers. The country's supply chain is very efficient considering local production and imported supplies.

Food imports in 2018 were RM40 billion a year and Malaysia has a good relationship with exporting countries to ensure the country's food supply continues.

Therefore, Malaysians need not panic or fear. The MCO has been in operation for over five weeks. Monitoring activities conducted by KPDNHEP enforcement forces found sufficient supply of essential goods in all supermarkets nationwide.

According to the MOA, the production of food products in Malaysia is more than adequate in comparison to consumption. For example, egg production alone actually exceeds demand.

Other essentials such as rice, cooking oil, flour, sugar, and wet goods have also been reported to be sufficient. There have been no reports of sudden price increases reported to KPDNHEP to date.

Perception of shortage in food supply

Often, consumers and buyers are confused when they look at empty shelves in supermarkets, and they are quick to jump to the conclusion that the items are out of stock.

In fact, the stock is only unavailable at the supermarket and doesn't affect stocks at other premises nationwide, which is contrary to their perception.

Not all supermarkets have the same store capacity. The size differentiates the amount of stock you can keep. The shelves will be immediately filled by the employee with the remaining stock kept in their store.

Each supermarket also has its own management system and policy for reorder. All are subject to stock at the central store and have a specific delivery period before arriving at the supermarket premises.

This process explains the actual situation that occurs when a consumer sees an empty shelf in a supermarket — it doesn't indicate the shortage of supply nationwide, but the fact is the premises has yet to receive new stocks to replenish its shelves.

To avoid misunderstanding, we recommend the supermarket management writes a notice on the empty shelves to notify that the goods are being ordered and to state the refill period.

Misperceptions on the part of consumers arise when the supermarket management fails to inform them of this important information.

Implementation of the 'Limited Purchase' step should also be carried out in the event that a product becomes popular to allow other users to obtain it. For example, if a certain bread becomes a hot sale, then every buyer can only be allowed to buy one or two loaves to avoid shortage of stock at the premises.

In addition to the stock replenishing process, the attitude of a few consumers who prefer to choose a particular brand or grade has also resulted in the confusion about the current situation of good supply in the market.

For example, some consumers only prefer a certain brand of bread and a certain grade of egg, and then they conclude that the product is out of stock when they find it is no longer in a supermarket. Whereas, the real situation is a lot of other brands of bread and other eggs of different grades are available on the shelves nearby.

Taking the MCO positively Whether we like it or not, we need to be positive in the face of adversity, including when the MCO is enforced to curb the spread of Covid-19 in our beloved country.

Now we've begun to see men, who are also the leaders of the family, have been more actively learning about the ingredients for cooking. They already know the difference between ginger, turmeric, and galangal.

They can distinguish the difference between turmeric and turmeric powder. At least the boys understand and appreciate the work of the mother at home.

The MCO also taught us to plan our spending. Buy only what you need and don't waste it. Eating foods that are convenient and easy to find should not be overdone but practise moderation. During this MCO period, we learn to accept the shortcomings and continue to live with more patience.

The MCO has also taught many people, including consumers and traders, to take advantage of e-commerce. Online orders, mobile-apps, and delivery services including food now come in handy. More Malaysians are becoming tech savvy and accustomed to the changes.

The MCO also strengthened family ties. Staying at home has strengthened family bonds. Many are able to do things that often can't be done due to their hectic career demands, such as eating together, helping children with online learning sessions, watching television, and contacting relatives.

In fact, many families too have also started to give more focus on the religious aspects of family life.

The main lesson we can learn from Covid-19 is that we need to be disciplined in maintaining hygiene. All groups of society need to be aware of this and I hope that the personal hygiene practices we are adopting today will continue to be our life's culture, towards a better Malaysia.

*Statistics from Khazanah Research Institute

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