



A farmer showing ginger grown in his farm in Bentong recently. The 'New Straits Times' on Saturday reported that 231 ginger farmers in Bentong could not renew their land permits with the state Forestry Department this year. FILE PIC

STATE LAND

'Bentong ginger farmers to get new site'

BENTONG: Ginger farmers operating along the hilly slopes of the Bukit Tinggi forest reserve here will have to move to a new site that has been identified by the state government.

The 231 farmers' land use permit (*permit penggunaan*) would no longer be renewed as a private company would take over the 286ha piece of land for eco-tourism development and the farmers would be relocated.

A Forestry Department source with knowledge of the ginger farm issue said the department would now degazette the forest reserve (land used for ginger farming) and provide the farmers with a new site.

"Since Bentong's ginger is popular, the state government feels that the farmers should be relocated and their farming (at the current site) should cease.

"The developer of the eco-tourism development will bear the cost of building basic infrastructure at the new site, which is not far from the existing farms.

"The developer is completing the Environmental Impact Assessment report of the new site before measuring and marking land plots, installing pipes and building roads for the farmers."

The source said the 231 farmers were aware of the rules and regulations of their land-use permits as they had signed an agreement when they moved to the site in 2008.

He said conditions in the deal included the right of the menteri besar to cancel the permits.

"The new land for the farmers

will be under the jurisdiction of the State Government Secretariat Corporation (PSK) and the permit payment will be collected by PSK. They will not pay directly to the Forestry Department. We hope the farmers will adhere to the instruction to relocate as they can be punished under the National Forestry Act for operating illegally in a reserve forest."

He said the current farms were not far from the Genting Sempah rest and recreation area and the new site was on the other side of the Karak Expressway.

On claims that the new land was not suitable for ginger farming, the source said there was no scientific evidence of that and the new and old farming sites had similar temperatures.

The *New Straits Times* on Saturday reported that the 231 farmers, who had been growing the popular Bentong ginger for five decades, were facing an uncertain future as they could not renew their land permits with the state Forestry Department this year.

They claimed that their farms would make way for a private development project and they would be given another land to farm on, but many were reluctant to leave their existing farms.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail could not be reached for comment. He is in China on a working visit.

It is learnt that state Agro-based Industry and Biotechnology Committee chairman Datuk Seri Mohd Soffi Abd Razak is also abroad for personal matters.