The folly of importing food that we can produce

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In this day and age, competitive advantage can be nurtured with advanced technologies. As proven by countries such as Israel (close to half the country is arid land) and Holland (one-third of the country is below sea level), productivity can be enhanced through precision farming and application of modern technologies using artificial intelligence, temperature and moisture sensors, aerial images, robots and GPS technology. These advanced devices and precision agriculture and robotic systems allow businesses to be more profitable, efficient, safer and more environmentally friendly. Similarly, with the abundance of biomass and food waste, Malaysia can easily produce her very own local fertilisers that would reduce production costs, besides establishing a local input sector. With an emphasis on a food first policy, the right R&D management and effective extension, this objective is not improbable, similarly, provision of fiscal incentives to young start-ups and entrepreneurs can be the impetus to drive the food sector to a greater height.

With better technology, Malaysia could save up to RM8 billion in food imports and RM6 billion in input imports respectively. But the bigger benefits are more than the value of input bills. They are resilience in nutritional security for our population, especially children; enhancement of local biodiversity; agribusiness sector development; dynamic rural communities; greening the landscape; natural resource preservation by small producers; and, most importantly, ecological services to the society. A particularly valuable example of the last benefit is the preservation of the bee population for the future.