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## Malaysian government announces plans for a public-private partnership in certification scheme

*At a public seminar in Kuala Lumpur on 13 August 2002 the Malaysian Department of Agriculture revealed the outline of its organic certification scheme, scheduled for implementation in January 2003. The surprise element in the proposed implementation of the Organik Malaysia scheme was the public-private partnership with Organic Alliance Malaysia (OAM), the private sector organic association.*

Though previously ignored in Malaysia, the Government's 3rd National Agriculture Policy (NAP3) identified organic agriculture as a niche market opportunity, particularly for fruit and vegetables. The government plans to encourage small-scale producers to venture into organic farming as part of the strategy to raise producers' income, overcome problems of chemical residues in food production, protect the environment, reduce food imports as well as enhance the country's export of high quality safe food. Setting up an accreditation scheme to facilitate domestic market development is included in NAP3.

In August 2001, the Malaysian Standards for the production, processing, labelling and marketing of plant based, organically produced foods (MS1529) were approved and published by the Department of Standards Malaysia. Implementation of the Department of Agriculture (DOA) organic certification scheme was ex-

pected to be launched on 13 August, 2002. However, it was announced at the public seminar/consultation, on that very day, for January 2003.

In his opening address at the seminar, the Minister of Agriculture noted that whilst there has been some organic farming in the country since late 1980s, it has not become widespread due to the lack of attention by the government. In addition to enhancing food safety for the domestic market, the Minister also observed that international market trends underline market opportunities for organic exports. According to the Minister support comparable to that given to conventional agriculture, *i.e.* credit facilities, extension, research and development, will in the future be devoted to develop organic agriculture in the country. The Ministry is studying the DOA's proposal to establish special organic production areas. It is reported that smallholders collectively owning up to 400,000 hectares of land, where chemical fertilisers or

The Ministry is studying proposal to establish special organic production areas.