

Headline	US-based Top-Line eyes more furniture imports from M`sia		
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BY ALVIN TANG

KUCHING: US-based Top-Line Furniture Corporation has expressed its intention to increase its import of furniture from Malaysia over the next few years to RM230 million a year.

The large furniture importer and wholesaler based in Chicago, Illinois has been sourcing home furnishings from Malaysia since 2000, with total imports amounting to RM840 million to date, according to International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) Tropical Timber Market Report (Sept 16-30, 2023).

The report said Top-Line's import increase will not only benefit Malaysian furniture manufacturers but also companies along the supply chain.

In 2022, Malaysia exported RM13.86 billion worth of furniture, with the United States being its top export market at RM7.24 billion or 52 per cent of total furniture exports.

For the first six months of 2023, Malaysia recorded furniture exports worth RM4.07 billion, of which 49 per cent went to US.

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On the bamboo industry, the ITTO report quoted Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof as saying when officiating the World Bamboo Day Malaysia 2023 at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) auditorium recently that the industry possesses immense potential to be developed and used as an alternative to timber.

He said bamboo is an abundant natural resource and Malaysia is home to about 70 bamboo species, with 45 being local species found in the country's forests.

Although export earnings from bamboo is considered small as compared to other forest products, Fadillah, who is also Plantation and Commodities Minister, said bamboo has the potential to be developed and used as an

alternative to wood in a variety of applications. He therefore called for the production of highly-marketable bamboo products to be prioritised.

Last year, Malaysia earned about RM14.5 million in the exports of bamboo products, a hefty 66.1 per cent increase as compared to RM8.7 million recorded in 2021.

According to Fadillah, there are currently some 577 industry players nationwide who are actively involved in the bamboo industry through various sectors, such as furniture, construction, textile, plantation, food, charcoal (bamboo briquettes) and handicraft.

"To effectively spur the national bamboo industry, a more effective and holistic approach must be taken to create a conducive

environment. This allows downstream industries to produce more valuable bamboo products," he added.

Fadillah said his ministry, through the Malaysian Timber Industry Board, has also taken various measures to improve the national bamboo industry. This includes building bamboo plantations in Hulu Terengganu, which comprises 15 hectares of land, and the bamboo community farming programme, which was approved under the 12th Malaysia Plan.

FRIM director-general Ismail Parlan said under the 12th Malaysia Plan, FRIM has conducted research on bamboo as a resource for the production of furniture, biofuel, construction and ecotourism products.

He said the agency has worked closely with various agencies in both the private and public sectors, resulting in the success of various technology-sharing initiatives.

Ismail said FRIM has conducted extensive bamboo research since 1980s, encompassing various aspects, such as taxonomy and planting techniques, among others. He said that research efforts focusing on bamboo plantations and produce also saw an emphasis on 13 species that possessed significant commercial value.

"The main reason for the research is to encourage the growth of the bamboo industry and to bring maximum economic benefits to the community," he added.