

Sekinchan—rice bowl of Selangor

The best way to learn about rice, the staple food of most Asians, is to visit the paddy gallery located in the rice-growing district of Sekinchan.

By S.L. Tan



Paddy field at Sekinchan

Sekinchan, which in the Chinese Teo Chew dialect means ‘land suitable for farming’, boasts of one of the highest rice yields in Malaysia. Sekinchan is located in the Barat Laut Selangor (North-west Selangor) Integrated Agricultural Development Area, one of the eight granary areas of the country. Indeed, Sekinchan frequently boasts of paddy yields in excess of 10 t/ha.

Paddy comes from the Malay word *padi*, which refers to rice with its husk (or hull) intact. Hulling involves the process of removing the husk, resulting in brown rice which is about 80% of the weight of paddy. The word “paddy” also refers to the rice field.

Table 1. Paddy and Rice Production in 2013

Granary	Area (ha)	Production (t)		Ave. paddy yield (t/ha)
		Paddy	Rice	
MADA ¹	187,413	941,889	612,228	5.03
KADA ²	38,641	159,800	103,870	4.14
IADA ³ :				
Kerian Sg. Manik	41,955	188,586	122,581	4.50
Barat Laut Selangor	37,833	237,594	154,436	6.28
Pulau Pinang	20,610	120,383	78,249	5.84
Seberang Perak	27,686	126,027	81,918	4.55
Ketara	9,752	54,114	35,175	5.55
Kemasin Semerak	5,383	18,815	12,229	3.50
Total (MADA, KADA, IADA)	369,273	1,847,208	1,200,686	5.00
Malaysia	606,846	2,555,132	1,648,414	4.21

¹Muda Agricultural Development Authority

²Kemubu Agricultural Development Authority

³Integrated Agricultural Development Areas

Source: Paddy Statistics of Malaysia (2013).

The obvious attractions at Sekinchan are the paddy fields and the paddy-processing factories or mills. Other attractions include the Paddy Gallery, swiftlet houses and, since Sekinchan is also a fishing village, many seafood restaurants.

With the rice crop jade-green when young, turning golden at harvest time under a clear blue sky, Sekinchan is a photographer's haven. Spectacular sunsets over the paddies and along the stretch of the fishing village are another lure.



Rice seedling transplanter.

Table 2. The rice cropping cycle in Sekinchan

	Month	Farming activity*/ Stage of crop growth	Colour of rice crop
1st Crop	January to February	Field clearing and fallow	No crop
	Beginning of March	Transplanting	Green
	Mid-March to mid-May	Growing crop	Darker green
	Mid-May	Maturing crop	Golden yellow
	June	Harvest	Yellow
2nd Crop	July-August	Field clearing and fallow	No crop
	Beginning of September	Transplanting	Green
	Mid-September to mid-November	Growing crop	Darker green
	Mid-November	Maturing crop	Golden yellow
	December	Harvest	Yellow

*Farming activities vary over two weeks

As in the other granary areas, double cropping of rice is practised at Sekinchan. The rice planting schedule in Table 2 will help the visitor decide the best time to visit.

To better understand the rice production process and to appreciate how modernization of farming

practices has alleviated the back-breaking field operations of the farmers, a stop at the Paddy Gallery is recommended. This museum was set up in 2013 by PLS Marketing (M) Sdn. Bhd. (or Kilang Beras Rakyat Sekinchan), one of the rice mills. For an entrance fee of RM5.00 per person (which comes with a 100-gram sample of pearl



Combine harvester at work on ripe paddy.



Sekinchan is also a fishing village.

rice), a visitor can choose to view a video clip in English or Mandarin. The video features mechanized rice production from seed selection, land preparation and planting, to fertilizer application, weeding and harvesting, contrasting these new methods with the traditional labour-intensive operations. The video ends with processing, which includes drying, milling, grading and packaging. A guide is available to answer any questions, after which the visitor can browse the photographs and posters with information on the history of Sekinchan and on rice production, as well as view the exhibits of old tools that were used in growing rice. One can also look down into the rice mill processing area to see the various operations. The visitor is finally led into a souvenir shop selling a range of rice products. Ice lollies, drinks and fruits are also on sale.

The Paddy Gallery can be accessed by turning right from Jalan Kuala Selangor into Jalan Parit 5, passing the paddy fields on both sides, and then turning left into Ban 2.



The Paddy Gallery is run by a rice mill.

The transplanting of rice, which used to take eight people over two days to plant 1.2 ha, is now completely mechanized and takes only 2½ hours. The process starts with soaking paddy seed to germinate them. The germinated seed are planted in nursery boxes in pre-fertilized soil. These are raised in a seedling nursery. After two weeks, when the seedlings are about 5–6 inches tall, the seedling mats are rolled up



Old tools for rice cultivation on display in the Paddy Gallery.

and loaded onto the mechanical transplanter for planting in the fields.

Likewise, the harvesting of paddy is now performed using a combine harvester, a machine which cuts the rice stalks, threshes and winnows the paddy, all in one go.

Rice processing or milling starts with drying the paddy for about 20 hours. The paddy is then cleaned before dehusking. Dehusked rice is what constitutes brown rice. If polishing follows, the result is white rice. Other processes include grading by percentage of broken rice, and colour sorting (by machine) so that only pure white rice is obtained. The final operation is packaging. The rice mill operated by PLS Marketing (M) Sdn. Bhd. has the capacity to produce 3 tonnes of packed rice per day. In addition to the usual bagging in plastic, this mill also produces vacuum-packed rice. Vacuum-packaging is particularly useful for extending the shelf-life of brown rice. Brown rice has its bran intact, and the oil in the bran can quickly become rancid in the presence of oxygen.



Visitors in the Rice shop.

PLS Marketing also has a team in Taiwan which produces pearl rice, i.e. *Oryza japonica*, used for making sushi. Pearl rice is also sold at the Rice Shop.

For those who are reluctant to cover everything on foot, there is a tram service (seating 10 persons) which will take the visitor around the paddies, the Paddy Gallery and also to a Chinese temple in the middle of the paddy fields, all for the price of RM10.00 per person.

It may be of interest to know that there are also other fascinating things to do along the Kuala Selangor road to Sekinchan. There is firefly-watching at Kampong Kuantan and Bukit Belimbing; bird-watching and learning about the mangrove ecosystem at the Kuala Selangor Nature Park run by the Malaysian Nature Society; and climbing up the historical Bukit Melawati with its lighthouse, and where cannons face the river mouth while silvered leaf monkeys abound.