THE Kota Belud Rice Bowl Development project has the potential to produce 85,000 metric tonnes of paddy per year, said Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Yahya Hussin.

Yahya who is also Agriculture & Food Industry Minister said the project which covers 5,000 ha of land will eventually boost rice self-sufficiency in Sabah from 27 per cent to 45 per cent.

“The Kota Belud Integrated Agriculture Development Area (IADA) will also see 10,000 ha of land for rice cultivation. The Federal government will give priority to the IADA areas when channelling funds for drainage and irrigation infrastructure,” said Yahya in his winding up speech in response to Klias Assemblyman Datuk Lajim Ukin at the State Legislative Assembly Sitting yesterday.

The project implemented under the Agriculture National Key Economic Area or NKEA-EPP 11 enables the harvesting of paddy to be carried out twice a year through the estate farming approach.

The objective of the project is to increase the productivity of paddy to 8.5 metric tonne per hectare by 2020.

On the call to open more paddy fields, Yahya said it is difficult to do it at the moment because the 136,090 ha of land that had been identified earlier for the purpose had already been given to several government agencies and companies and most of it cultivated with oil palm.

Meanwhile, Yahya said his ministry had provided various types of agricultural training programmes for youths to prepare them to take over from ageing farmers.

“So far 2,568 youths have been successfully trained for commercial farming at the Food Sustainable Production Park,” he said.

The Farmers’ Organisation Authority (FOA) through the Kor Tani movement implemented the management and expertise course for 200 agropreneurs age 18-40 years, through the financial support of Agro Bank, Tekun and FOA Kor Tani Entrepreneur Development.

Similarly, the Department of Veterinary Services & Animal Industry also provided many training programmes for youths while Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Teknologi Mara offers the My-Agrosis special programme designed for students to be trained directly in the agriculture sector by the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority.