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Farms modelled after those in the Cotswolds being planned

A. Kadir Jasin; Syed Nadzri in Edinburgh, Scotland  
PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants modern farms, modelled after villages in the Cotswolds in England, to be started in Malaysia to replace the uneconomical traditional single-crop farming.

He said the Government was looking for a suitable piece of land, about 4,000 hectares, in Kedah to set up an experimental farm with the assistance of experts from the Cotswold Agricultural College.

"What we want to do is try to restructure our farming practices so that we have big, modern farms," he told Malaysian journalists at a Press conference at the end of the four-day Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on a report in the London Sunday Times newspaper that Malaysia was building a replica of the villages in the Cotswolds complete with working farms.

He had visited the Cotswolds last July and was reported to be impressed with the villages and their modern farming methods.

Dr Mahathir said farming methods in the English countryside were so advanced that an 8,000-acre farm was managed by only eight workers and grown with a variety of crops.

"What we want to know is, with advice from the College of Agriculture in Cotswold, how to mix the crops so that even if there is a fall in price of one crop, the farmers will be protected by the good prices of other crops," he added.

Dr Mahathir said apart from crop cultivation and animal husbandry, well-planned villages and homes could also be built to enhance the landscape and create tourism opportunities.

"We have to change our way of living. We don't have young people working on farms now.

"What we need are trained farm managers and they will employ a small number of trained people to operate farm machinery and plant vegetables, fruit trees, padi, rubber and oil palm," he said.

The Prime Minister said such farms could also be used to grow local herbal plants which were fast disappearing.

According to the Sunday Times, Professor Paul Davies, an agricultural economist from the college, had visited Malaysia earlier this month to look at possible sites for the farm.

The Cotswolds is famous for its farms and dry stone-walled cottages, which are a great tourist attraction.

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