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## Site in Kedah chosen for experiments in agriculture

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - More than 4,000 hectares of land in Kedah will be utilised to experiment with new ideas for growing crops and plants in an attempt to revolutionise the country's agricultural industry.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said the site, granted by the State Government, would be used for mixed planting and high-technology agricultural methods.

"We will try planting techniques such as those used in developed nations and work on ideas gained by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his two-month holiday overseas," he told reporters after launching a seminar on coastal studies at the Flamingo Hotel today.

However Dr Sulaiman did not disclose the site's whereabouts.

The Minister will meet Dr Mahathir on Aug 13 to discuss experiments to be carried out at the site, including the types of crops and plants to be planted and machinery to be used on the land.

He said the Government was working on ways to advance the agricultural industry by encouraging mixed crop planting, use of high-technology machinery and proper land management as practised in developed countries.

"In the United States, two men using the latest machinery can plant seed, fertilise the earth and spray pesticides over an area of 8,000 hectares," Dr Sulaiman said.

The Minister said there was an urgent need to adapt new technology to local conditions as some agricultural endeavours such as padi planting had to be subsidised by the Government to ensure they survived.

"Most of our padi planters still use old methods or old machinery and manage at most 1.2 hectares of land each.

"We have been subsidising them to the tune of RM500 million a year to maintain their income, in view of competition from rice producers outside."

To make sure that the agricultural sector continues to exist and become commercially viable, the Government is also drafting a new Agricultural Act, to be submitted to Parliament at the end of this month.

Dr Sulaiman said in view of new ideas in farming, this year's Farmers' Day would be different, adding that Dr Mahathir would announce a new national agricultural policy on that day.

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