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Commercial farm to be developed

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Royal Agricultural College of the United Kingdom will assist in the development of a 4,000ha commercial farm here to ensure self-sufficiency in food.

Its vice-principal Professor W. Paul Davies said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had given the college the task after visiting it in 1997.

"Dr Mahathir visited our college during his two-month trip to Europe in May 1997 and had expressed keen interest in developing large commercial farming areas in Malaysia," he said in an interview.

He said the Prime Minister had also asked RAC to act as an advisory body in ensuring the success of the pilot project.

Davies said Malaysia should look towards larger and more competitive farming to reduce its food bill and compete in the increasingly challenging global market.

He said the present spread of smaller farms was insufficient to meet future needs.

Davies is among speakers at a three-day convention at Putra World Trade Centre in conjunction with the Asia Agricultural Exposition and Convention 1999.

He said the pilot project would be supervised by the Prime Minister's Department and Agriculture Ministry.

"We have held a series of discussions and have even conducted soil studies on the proposed site," he said, adding that the environmental impact of such a large project was being looked into.

He said the project was expected to take off by the end of the year.

At present, 65 per cent of the country's rice is produced locally with the rest imported from neighbouring countries including Thailand.

"The Government has realised that the resources from these countries could not be taken for granted and there is a need for Malaysia to pay more attention to its agricultural sector," he said.

He added that the Government should also pay more attention to attracting the youth into the agricultural sector to ensure the maintenance and development of the sector.

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