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20 firms ready to start mammoth farming project

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JOHOR BARU, Fri. - Some 20 major companies have mobilised equipment and labour to kickstart operations in Malaysia's biggest commercial farming project, covering 4,000ha in Air Hitam, Johor.

The project, known as the Premier Agriculture Programme, is an idea that was mooted by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and based on a master plan drawn up by the Royal Agriculture College in the United Kingdom.

With the blueprint in hand, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman has been pushing hard to make it all come true.

The selected companies are committed to investing more than RM100 million over the next three years to transform Air Hitam into the country's single biggest commercial food production zone.

These investors are putting their money in a whole range of agriculture ventures, from mixed food production to livestock rearing.

Eleven of them are Johor-based, while the rest are from elsewhere. The companies, among others, are Lazuli Sdn Bhd, Corak Mas Sdn Bhd, Xian Leng Holdings and Herbal Bagus Enterprise.

Of these, four are into livestock breeding, with large-scale farms in Padang Hijau in Kahang which commenced operations last September. The others are involved in aquaculture, vegetable and fruit farming. These farms are scheduled to start operations in stages. The companies selected for participation in this premier project were chosen based on their proven track records in agriculture and their ability to inject funds to develop the farms.

"Over the next three to five years, these companies will invest in agricultural technology and equipment to convert the land into large-scale commercial farms for the production of vegetables, fruit, herbs and spice, as well as fish and livestock," said State Executive Councillor, Othman Jais, who holds the Agriculture and Rural Development portfolio.