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College to produce professional farmers to be ready in 2007

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - An institution to become the driving force behind the nation's need for eminent farmers will be set up soon.

Expected to be completed in early 2007, Kolej Pertanian Malaysia, the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, may be the solution to the country's lack of professional farm managers.

The Agriculture Ministry's RM200 million project to help spur the country's third engine of growth is aimed at producing world-class players in the farming sector.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Nawawi said the nation would face a deficit trade balance of RM20 billion in seven years' time if food production was not increased and the college was not in place to help boost the sector.

At present, Malaysia registers a trade deficit of about RM5.6 billion for food products and the ministry hopes to cut this by half by 2005.

Effendi said the Government was also looking at acquiring some 1.5 million hectares of land to increase food production.

"By 2010, we want to be a net exporter. We can achieve this but we need the private sector to contribute capital resources and management.

"To achieve growth in new agricultural areas, we need new farming skills," he said, adding the college idea was mooted with the needs of the private sector in mind.

"In our bid to produce the much needed efficient human resources for the industry, we are designing programmes and curriculums in consultation with the private sector to ensure that the trainees have the relevant skills," he said, adding he was optimistic that the sector would be committed to the project as the college was designed for its needs.

The college, to be built on a 304ha site in Bukit Tangga, Kedah, will be able to accommodate 7,200 students.