

# Malaysia and Italy to work together in agriculture

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**ROME:** Malaysia and Italy have agreed to set up a joint committee to promote cooperation in agriculture.

The committee is being set up to formulate and implement the projects and objectives of a joint declaration on agriculture that the two governments signed here yesterday.

Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said a similar joint business council by the private sector would also be set up to assist in promoting agriculture-based trade.

"The areas of cooperation between the governments will include agriculture, livestock, fisheries, research and development, and agro-based and food-processing industries.

"Italy is well known for such sectors. But all this will not be effective without private sector involvement," Muhyiddin told reporters after the signing of the declaration, which was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Muhyiddin said the present bilateral agriculture trade was RM1.15bil but this could still be improved.

On Italian agriculture expertise, Muhyiddin said Malaysia was especially interested in biotech knowledge as well as how they were dealing with the issue of genetically modified organisms in food.

"We, too, in Malaysia need to deal with this issue as there is more and more public interest in the matter. The Europeans are leading in the debate on this matter," he added.

Muhyiddin said his ministry was also interested in Italian expertise in farm mechanisation.