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Helping farmers improve crop yield

Using technology, Mimos wants to empower farmers with precision agriculture methods so they can venture into higher-value and premium crops

■ By Marino Emmanuel
marino@nstp.com.my

ON THE shoulders of a rubber plantation at Bukit Tinggi in Kedah, fresh and buttery-tasting sweet corn are being grown. Next month, they will find their way to Tesco stores.

The pioneer commercial farming project under the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCEB) covers an estimated 80 hectares of land. Sime Darby Bhd is spearheading the project.

Planting began at the end of June of this year, and harvesting is carried out every alternate day. Over 100,000 cobs of corn have been harvested since September and the corn will be marketed under the 'Sime Fresh' brand.

More than 500km away at the Technology Park Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, technology experts at Mimos Bhd are busy finding ways to help farmers in Kedah, and elsewhere in Malaysia, increase the yield and quality of their agriculture produce.

Using technology, Mimos wants to empower farmers with precision agriculture methods so they can venture into higher-value and premium crops.

"We want to target rural farmers with a sensor so they are able to control soil moisture and also monitor chemicals in water," Mimos president and chief executive officer Datuk Abdul Wahab Abdulah told journalists during a recent media briefing in Langkawi.

The home-grown sensor, which will resemble a pen-shaped probe and designed to be planted in soil, is expected to be



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commercialised by the middle of next year.

The wireless sensor, Abdul Wahab added, can be used for a variety of crops ranging from padi to corn.

"If farmers are in a position to control the amount of water and fertiliser, this is sure

to enhance the quality and yield of their crops."

The painstaking attention to detail on the type of crops and farming which can be modernised, is carried out at Mimos by its director for Microsystems and Micro Electro Mechanical Systems (MEMS) Professor

Dr Masuri Othman.

"Our aim is to increase the income of farmers in big plantations and rural areas through this acidity sensor," he said.

Pointing to the fact that imported sensors which are used in Malaysia are priced between RM2,000 and RM3,000 a piece, Masuri says Mimos wants to price the item at about RM100.

The sensor, which operates on Mimos' MEMS technology platform, is currently being tested in collaboration with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia at the university's greenhouses.

"We are also in collaboration with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia and hope to leverage on Universiti Sains Malaysia's microchip design for analog mixed signals in the sensor," Masuri said.

To get the sensors to "talk" to each other, Mimos is working on a wireless technology known as "WiWi", which will see information from the sensors being transmitted to a base-station which is connected via a larger wireless broadband coverage.

"Our agriculture farmers," noted Abdul Wahab, "have a lot of knowledge which has not been captured and this knowledge needs to be protected in order for Malaysia to gain a competitive edge."

He said once the robust sensors have been introduced to local farmers, Mimos hopes the product can be exported to developing countries like Indonesia and Africa.

