Gulf company interested in Sudan farming project

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AMMAN — The government is considering a proposal by a regional private company to participate in a project to invest in Sudanese agricultural land, a senior government official said on Saturday.

"We have been officially contacted by a financing and agricultural company based in the Gulf, which showed interest in taking part in the Sudan project," Minister of Agriculture Saeed Masri told The Jordan Times yesterday, stopping short of naming the potential partner.

But the response to the proposal will not be immediate, pending the completion of an update to the project's feasibility study, he said.

"The main challenge facing the implementation is how to secure the required funds for infrastructure works. The government's decision to go ahead with the project is hinges on the findings of the feasibility study," the minister added.

Masri said the update is expected to be concluded before next weekend.

The study is designed to define the financial needs of the agricultural project, which moved into the spotlight last year amid rising prices of food worldwide, and a decision by Khartoum to set a deadline for the investment to start.

In early October, Masri stated that the Sudanese government intended to take back the land allocated for the megaproject, some 87,000 dunums, if Jordan did not implement the project by the end of this month, more than a decade after the original deal signed.
Masri said yesterday they received positive indications from the Sudanese embassy in Amman that the Sudanese government is considering a one-year extension for the deadline.

The feasibility of the project, which entails Jordan cultivating agricultural products near the Nile to be shipped directly to the Kingdom's markets, needed to be reviewed due to the economic climate, according to the ministry.

The government conducted a $359,000 feasibility study on the project in 2003, funded by the Islamic Bank in Jeddah.

Citing the findings of the study, the ministry officials have said that yields from the project would provide the Kingdom with at least 40 per cent of its annual needs of meat, 100 per cent of clover, 40 per cent of garlic, 100 per cent of bananas and 100 per cent of mangoes.

Earlier last year, the government announced a plan to enter into an agreement with a consortium comprising four Jordanian firms under which they would benefit from customs exemptions and other incentives provided by the Sudanese government.

The plan did not materialise after the private sector withdrew, citing the government's failure to fund its JD10 million share in the JD60 million project.

By Hani Hazaimeh

Source: Jordan Times
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