

Mauritius buys farm land near Maputo

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Port Louis - Mauritius plans to buy 20 000 hectares of prime farmland in Mozambique to alleviate mounting worries about food security on the import-dependent island.

A successful project in Mozambique would be a stepping stone towards similar ventures in other parts of the continent, Foreign Affairs Minister Arvin Boolell said on Saturday.

Boolell said 5 000 hectares in Mozambique's Central Province were earmarked and another 10 000 hectares in Marracuene, near Maputo, were available. A further 5 000 hectares were under negotiation.

The Mauritian government, which set aside \$31.75 million (R255.6 million) for a food security fund in its 2008/2009 budget, plans to sub-lease the farms out to investors.

Vita Grain Ltd, a Singaporean firm registered in Mauritius that is developing hybrid rice varieties on the island - has submitted a \$43.5 million proposal for the 10 000 hectare site.

The Swaziland-based Ning Group has also shown interest, Boolell said.

Gulf states have bought farmland in recent years in Sudan, the biggest recipient of aid from the UN's World Food Programme.

The UN has voiced concern that the rights of farmers in poorer countries are being compromised. - Reuters
