

## **An Innovative Road to Cut Lentil Imports in Rice Growing Countries**

**Feb 18, Kolkata, India:** Rice farmers in the villages of West Bengal and Bangladesh are opening a new path for India and neighboring countries to reducing their dependence on foreign lentils – its largest consumers in the world. These farmers are growing lentils in their field left fallow after rice harvest with the help of an agricultural research and training project. The scientists took a delegation from Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan on a first-of-its-kind traveling workshop through villages from Dhaka to Kolkata where the practice is quietly taking roots. As the nine-day journey concluded yesterday, the progress is showing the signs of what could be the next green revolution in this part of the world.

“In West Bengal alone, five to six districts specially have high potential for this approach to lentil production and can substantially save foreign exchange spent on lentil imports”, noted Purnendu Basu, Minister of Agriculture of West Bengal, the main rice growing state in India, in discussions with the delegation. Even though India is the largest producer of lentils in the world, it relies heavily on imports and bought 53% of its needs in 2013.

“A key scientific enabler has been that these lentil varieties are bred to have shorter growing season so they can be suitably accommodated between two rice growing seasons,” says Dr. Shiv Kumar Agrawal, lead legume breeder at ICARDA – a work funded under CGIAR’s Grain Legumes Research Program. Other success factors in establishing a thriving rice-lentil system are new higher-yielding varieties of lentils resistant to common diseases, and extensive training of rice farmers in managing lentil crops.

The approach has already proven its potential in Bangladesh. Lentil cropping has spread to more than 85 percent of rice fallows in the country, bringing in an additional annual income of US \$26.6 million. For small-scale farmers, obtaining a harvest of lentils from the same piece of land has not only improved their livelihood but also nutrition for their families.

“In South Asia region, there is a substantial area under rice farming but the land is left fallow sometimes even up to six months every year”, says Dr. Ashutosh Sarker, the South Asia Regional Program coordinator of ICARDA. To accelerate the trend, ICARDA has launched a new pulses research platform in Madhya Pradesh. The hub will be supporting and building the region’s capacity for pulse production in partnership with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and state partners.

Flickr Gallery: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/47730240@N05/sets/72157650578036520/>

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## **About ICARDA**

The International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), a CGIAR global agricultural research organization, works with countries in the world's dry and marginal lands to improve income and nutrition for smallholders and pastoralists, and strengthen national food security through sustainable systems solutions. The Center's integrated approach includes improved wheat, barley and legume crop varieties; water productivity; agronomy; rangeland and small ruminant production; and socio-economic and policy research to enable large-scale impacts. [www.icarda.org](http://www.icarda.org)