

## **ICARDA Honored with Gregor Mendel Innovation Prize for Safely Duplicating Syria Genebank**

**Berlin, March 19:** ICARDA is being honored with the prestigious Gregor Mendel Innovation Prize for successfully securing the globally important collection of crop genetic resources stored in its genebank in Tel Hadya, Syria, despite the challenging conditions of civil war.



*The Genetic Resources Team in Tel Hadya, Syria, commended for their efforts*

“Over the years, ICARDA had managed to safety-duplicate most of its genebank collections outside Syria. When the conflict there escalated, we sped up the duplication and now have secured 100% of the germplasm collection outside Syria. We also duplicated 80% of our collection in Svalbard Seed Vault in Norway already. I’m also glad to add that ICARDA had earlier rescued and safety-duplicated germplasm collections from Afghanistan and Iraq,” says Mahmoud Solh, the Director General of ICARDA.

“The efforts of Mahmoud Solh and his teams are valuable not only for plant breeders who are highly dependent on diversity to improve agricultural varieties but also for following

generations who benefit from drought tolerant and disease and pest resistant crops” justifies Dr. h. c. Peter Harry Carstensen, President of the Gregor Mendel Foundation.

“We take it as an integral responsibility of ICARDA as we work with governments for food security and improving rural livelihoods in conflict and post-conflict zones”, points out Solh.

ICARDA’s Genebank holds perhaps the world’s largest collection of landraces and wild relatives of barley, lentil, chickpea, faba bean, forage and rangeland species, along with durum and bread wheat, collected from dry regions where the earliest known crop domestication practices originated. These include major Centers of Diversity including the ‘Fertile Crescent’ in Western Asia, the Abyssinian highlands in Ethiopia, the Mediterranean Region and the Central Asia and Caucasus Region. Its unique holdings of Rhizobium bacteria, instrumental in the fixation of atmospheric nitrogen in food legumes crops, has a vital role in the sustainability of life on earth.

Aside from samples sent to Svalbard Seed Vault for long-term conservation, these genetic resources are safety-duplicated at CIMMYT, ICRISAT, Vavilov Research Institute-Russia, USDA in USA, India and Germany, among many partners.

ICARDA is especially grateful to CGIAR, World Bank, the German Government, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Corporation (ACIAR), the Global Crop Diversity Trust (GCDT) and Grains Research and Development (GRDC) of Australia for supporting its genetic resources and Genebank activities.

### **Recognition for ICARDA Staff for Stepping Up to the Mission**

ICARDA’s management and the Genetic Resources Team in Aleppo are being commended for their concerted effort from 2012 to 2014 toward ensuring safety duplication of almost its entire Genebank collection holding of about 148, 000 accessions, even as the routine services and infrastructure broke down with the civil strife in Syria.

Photo gallery of ICARDA Team at work in Aleppo, Syria:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/28y28mwqy8c533t/AADXGBxQMy6ogfaNNh5CsD2sa#/>