



ICARDA
Science for Better Livelihoods in Dry Areas

PRESS RELEASE

ICARDA calls upon joining forces to improve food security in MENA region

Beirut, 20 March 2017 – Speaking at the [Global Forum for Innovations and Agriculture \(GFIA\)](#) in Abu Dhabi today, Dr. Andrew Noble, Deputy Director General of the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and representing the ICARDA Director General Aly Abousabaa, has called upon capitalizing on proven agricultural technologies and innovations to enhance food security in MENA region.

Farmers across the Arab region face multiple production constraints: a degraded natural resource base, chronic water scarcity, variable weather patterns, and a range of pests and diseases, which severely affect the production of staple crops – especially wheat. The result is a large and growing import burden that undermines food security and exposes countries to the vagaries of global commodity markets.

“Water and food security are the key challenges under climate change in MENA,” he said. “Investing into increasing food production enhances agricultural productivity under changing climate conditions in the region,” Dr. Noble emphasized.

The ICARDA led ‘[Enhancing Food Security in Arab Countries](#)’ initiative, supported by [Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development](#), the [Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development](#), the [Islamic Development Bank](#), the [OPEC Fund for International Development](#), the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), is demonstrating significant development outcomes, unlocking the potential with science and technology, Dr. Noble highlighted.

Initiated in 2011, ‘Enhancing Food Security in Arab Countries’ promotes proven technologies and strategies – including improved varieties that are high-yielding and tolerant to a range of biotic and abiotic stresses; sustainable agronomic practices such as conservation agriculture and raised-bed planting; and the more efficient use of scarce water resources, through improved irrigation and water management systems.

During the initiative’s first phase (2011-14), average yields across all large-scale demonstration sites increased by 28%, with a maximum yield increase of 75%. These gains held up during the first and

second growing seasons of the initiative's second phase (2014-2018) when the average yield increase was also 28%, and the maximum yield increase was 59%.

In order to enhance the dissemination and uptake of the new technologies, ICARDA and its National Agricultural Research System partners work closely together to define and streamline innovative extension methodologies, taking into account the specific information needs, cultures and services available in each MENA region country.

Returns on investment have been considerable: an initial investment of 5.3 million USD has generated an estimated additional in-pocket gain of 54.2 million USD for farmers in Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan. Additional estimates suggest that achievable gains could reach 61.4 million USD across Sudan, Syria, and Morocco. A recent impact study of raised bed technology showed that Egyptian wheat producers' benefits could reach the level of US \$4.5 billion in a 15-year project horizon and that these benefits could be shared by more than 1 million farmers as of 2023.

"The partnership between donors, ICARDA and National Agricultural Research Systems has demonstrated significant development outcomes," the ICARDA DDG stated.

The Arab Food Security Initiative is focusing on long-term impacts by prioritizing the capacity strengthening of farmers and extension and technical staff from agriculture-related ministries, institutions and associations. This approach – which has already reached over 45,000 beneficiaries and an additional 19,000 technicians, researchers and policy-makers - includes country and regional training activities, inter-country scientific visits, travelling workshops and symposia, farmer field schools, and field days.

The initiative is now looking to build upon its successes: extending its reach and ensuring that more farmers, and extension and technical officers have access to the project's technologies and innovations. In its second phase, it plans to scale-out innovations to cover more wheat-growing areas in participating countries - helping to raise productivity on an even wider scale and improve the livelihoods of millions.

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Please, find a photo of Andrew Noble, ICARDA DDG for Research, representing Aly Abousabaa, ICARDA DG giving his talk #GFIAAbuDhabi [here](#).

About ICARDA

The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) is a global agricultural research organization working with countries in the world's dry and marginal areas to deliver sustainable systems solutions that increase productivity, improve rural nutrition, and strengthen national food security. ICARDA is a member of CGIAR, a group of 15 international agricultural research centers that produce public goods science. www.icarda.org

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