

Press release

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Regional Research Center in Turkey to Combat Cereal Rust Diseases

Izmir, Turkey – With the inauguration of the Regional Cereal Rust Research Center in Turkey, ICARDA and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock have formalized efforts to help fight cereal rust diseases.

Situated in Turkey’s Aegean Agricultural Research Institute in Izmir, the Center is the result of partnership between ICARDA and the General Directorate of Agricultural Research and Policies – also known as TAGEM – at the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock.

“There is an urgent need to boost investment in research to help farmers address the threat rust diseases pose,” said Aly Abousabaa, ICARDA’s director general. “For many households in developing countries, farming is the only source of income. If the main crop is affected by rust disease, it hurts yields and threatens resilience of families and communities.”

Among its core services to countries where rust disease affects cereal farming, the center can conduct regional rust surveillance and disease monitoring. It can identify and track the movement of physiological strains of rust pathogens as a way to develop solutions. It also enables precise field-resistance screening of wheat and barley cultivars and breeding lines against stripe rust, leaf rust, and stem rust diseases. The state-of-the-art bio-safety facility – the first of its kind in the developing world – has been constructed with funding from the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock. The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CGIAR Research Program on Wheat, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, Cornell University’s Borlaug Global Rust Initiative, and UKAID and have also supported the establishment of the Center.

“We look forward to continuing our partnership with ICARDA. Together, we will place Izmir on the map of global resources when it comes to developing innovative solutions that can help us tackle rust diseases,” said H. Gazi Kaya, director general of TAGEM.

ICARDA and the Turkish partners have been collaborating on scientific research activities in the past five years. The collaboration iterated the importance of enhanced rust research, as well as the need for training facilities and regional cooperation to tackle rust outbreaks. The Center is currently evaluating some 16,000 wheat types that have been submitted from national and international breeding programs. Partners are using data and findings from the work to make breeding programs more effective through the development of durable rust-resistant varieties.

The Center will cooperate closely with national breeding and pathology programs in Central and West Asia, and North and sub-Saharan Africa. It will work closely with advanced cereal rust laboratories in Denmark, France, Canada, and the United States.

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Izmir is strategically located in the center of the “wheat belt” – linking Southern, East, and North Africa with West, Central, and South Asia – that produces more than 30% of the world’s wheat. From here, the Regional Cereal Rust Research Center will provide national wheat-breeding programs with strategic support – helping farmers, policy makers, and national agricultural research and extension services to rapidly respond to outbreaks.

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