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## **Call for Action on Salinity: a Growing Agricultural Crisis @ EXPO Milano 2015**

### **Reclaiming Once Fertile Lands of Iraq, the Cradle of Agriculture**

*September 10, 2015*

Iraq, once the cradle of agriculture, is facing a growing crisis as increasing levels of salinity in its soil and irrigation water are reducing the country's food production. Today, some 70 percent of the country's irrigated area suffers from varying levels of salinity.

**An estimated 25,000 hectares of Iraqi farmland are abandoned every year because of elevated salt levels** from a combination of poor drainage system and salt-laden irrigation water, particularly in the Tigris-Euphrates basin in central and southern Iraq – the country's traditional breadbasket.

**The 'roadmap' to implement evidence-based salinity reduction and management is no doubt both time- and money-intensive. But what are the trade-offs?**

"The cost of business as usual will be far more hard to afford in the long run. The ability of irrigated production systems to provide sustained high productivity is critical for food security", states Dr. Kamel Shideed, Agricultural Economist and head of International Cooperation at ICARDA, who will set the stage for discussion on salinity and sustainable agriculture development in Iraq.

**Event:** [Mesopotamia, Cradle of Agriculture](#)

**Organized by:** The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and University of Firenze in partnership with ICARDA and other partners

**When & Where:** September 10, 2015 at Cascina Triulza Pavilion, Expo Milano

A group of high-level policy-makers from Iraq and Italy will gather with scientists and socio-economists from development agencies, international research organizations and academia to highlight problems with agriculture production in Iraq and foster dialogue and cooperation on turning around the alarming levels of growing food insecurity in the country. Participants include Iraq's Ministers of Agriculture and Higher Education and Scientific Research.

[The Iraq Salinity Project](#), a multi-disciplinary research project managed by ICARDA in partnership with the Government of Iraq, will provide scientific basis for discussions. The workshop aims to gain consensus and support on a science and technology-driven framework to address the complex challenges of climate change, limited water resources and land degradation in Iraq.

### **Why Prioritize Salinity Problem**

Salinity, common to irrigated production systems, is fast becoming a silent killer of productive lands, e.g., Indo-Gangetic Basin in India, Euphrates River Basin, Nile Delta, and Aral Sea Basin. Roughly 40% of the world's food comes from irrigated farming. Today more than 20% of this area is facing loss of productivity from rising salt levels in soil. The global cost of salinity-afflicted loss in crop yields is costing a hefty sum of roughly \$27.3 billion (USD) per year, according to a recent study, [Economics of Salt-induced Land Degradation and Restoration](#), published by CGIAR's Research Program on Water and Land Ecosystems. Furthermore, the salinized areas are increasing at a rate of 10% annually for various reasons.