

ICARDA launches international coalition to protect date palms

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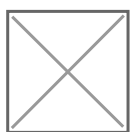
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At the 17th Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation, in a bold step towards global pest control and sustainable agriculture, UAE, Gates Foundation and ICARDA have officially launched the International Consortium for Red Palm Weevil Control, a science-led partnership bringing together world-leading institutions, researchers, and policymakers to combat one of the most destructive pests affecting palm cultivation worldwide.

The Consortium was inaugurated by H.E. Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence and Chairman of the Khalifa Award's Board of Trustees. Co-funded by the UAE and the Gates Foundation, the initiative is led by ICARDA, as the regional CGIAR Center, in partnership with the Khalifa Award's General Secretariat, sister CGIAR Centers, and a global network of national and international collaborators.



The Consortium builds on the momentum of the strategic UAE-Gates Foundation partnership announced at COP28, which earmarked \$200 million to support agricultural innovation in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), to support the

implementation of the historic UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems. The UAE became the first donor country in the MENA region to join the CGIAR System Council.Â

â??The Consortium represents an ambitious partnership driven by advancing science and bringing together leading research institutions, governments, and global experts, to confront one of the most devastating threats to palm cultivation,â? stated H.E. Sheikh Nahayan.

â??We express our appreciation for the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation, not only for hosting us this evening but for bringing us alongside champions of research, excellence, and innovation in date palm agriculture. We are also incredibly grateful to the Gates Foundation for their partnership and unwavering belief in the power of science to solve real world problems. To our scientific partner and project manager, ICARDA, thank you for your technical leadership and your dedication to transforming agriculture across dryland regions,â? added Mr. Khalfan Al Matrooshi on behalf of H.E. Mariam Al-Meheiri, Chair of the International Affairs Office (IAO) at the Presidential Court, UAE.

â??The Red Palm Weevil is not just a pest â?? itâ??s a growing global challenge that demands a coordinated scientific response. Through this Consortium, we combine the best CGIAR science, regional knowledge, and local partnerships to deliver real-world solutions. ICARDA is proud to serve as a scientific and implementation lead in this effort, working closely with the UAE and our international partners to protect livelihoods, preserve ecosystems, and ensure the resilience of one of the worldâ??s most iconic crops.â?•

The Consortiumâ??s five scientific workstreams, each led by a specialized institution, will use the UAE as a testing ground for innovations that can be scaled and transferred to affected LMICs:

- **Bio-based Innovations (icipe, Kenya):**Â Developing nature-based pest control methods using pheromones, fungi, and classical biocontrol agents.
- **Biotechnological Innovations (IITA, Kenya):**Â Applying genome editing, RNA interference, and microbiome disruption tools.
- **Digital Innovations & AI (ICRISAT, India):**Â Creating predictive tools, IoT sensors, and AI platforms for early pest detection.
- **Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) (ICBA, UAE):**Â Promoting scalable field-level practices for prevention and control.
- **Policy, Institutions & Global Access (ICARDA, UAE Regional Hub):**Â Ensuring innovations are embedded in policy frameworks and accessible across borders.

Leveraging Science to Drive Global Solutions

This Consortium cements ICARDAâ??s position at the forefront of global efforts to combat agricultural pests and diseases, reflecting our commitment to CGIARâ??s science-driven partnerships that deliver real-world impact across dryland farming systems.

â??By mobilizing global expertise through CGIAR, local knowledge through ICARDA, and with the UAE as a testbed and a living laboratory, this program ensures that cutting-edge research translates into practical solutions for rural communities across the region,â? said Zahira El Marzouki, Head of Middle East Relations at the Gates Foundation. â??As a woman from the region, I cannot say how much inspiration I find in the three incredible women leaders who have been the architects of this partnership, H.E. Mariam Al-Meheiri at the UAE Presidential Court, Dr. Ismahane Elouafi at CGIAR, and Dr. Tarifa Al-Zaabi at ICBA.â?•

Dr. Abdelouahhab Zaid, Secretary General of the Khalifa Award, echoed this commitment:Â â??The Khalifa Award has long championed excellence and innovation in agricultural research, particularly in the cultivation and protection of date palms â?? a crop that holds deep economic and cultural significance across the region. Through this Consortium, we are proud to bring that legacy forward, scaling scientific solutions that can be shared across borders. This initiative reflects the UAEâ??s deep commitment to supporting global food security through practical, science-based partnerships.â?

Through this Consortium, the UAE is reaffirming its position as a science-driven, impact-oriented partner to vulnerable agricultural communities, bringing innovation to where it is needed most. ICARDA is honored and privileged to be the UAEâ??s chosen scientific lead partner in this effort, working together to ensure that transformative agricultural research reaches all rural communities across the drylands.