ICBA hosts big agri-tech showcase for UAE farmers, agri-businesses

Dubai, UAE, February 20, 2019 – More than 100 leading farmers, agri-businesses, senior officials and representatives of different government entities from across the UAE today visited a major one-of-a-kind showcase of tailor-made agri-solutions at the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) in Dubai.

The open day was aimed at presenting to local farmers, agri-businesses and other stakeholders a wide range of agri-technologies and crops that had been developed, tested and proven by ICBA and its partners to perform well in local conditions.

Organized with support from H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, UAE Minister of State for Food Security; the Islamic Development Bank; the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi; the Abu Dhabi Farmers' Services Centre; the Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development; and the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation, the open day was the first in a series of events slated for 2019 to mark 20 years since ICBA's establishment by the visionary leadership of the UAE Government and the Islamic Development Bank.

Alongside H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, other guests of honour at the event included H.E. Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, Managing Director of the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi and the Chairperson of the ICBA Board of Directors; Dr. Abdelouahhab Zaid, Agricultural Advisor at the Ministry of Presidential Affairs of the UAE and a member of the ICBA Board of Directors and other dignitaries.

"Research and development is the essential underpinning of food security, as it leads to the creation of cutting-edge technology that is key to boosting food production and minimising the use of precious resources, in particular water. In fact, R&D has been identified as being one of the most effective of all public investments in driving down poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Such is the importance of this area that R&D has been enshrined as a key component of the UAE's National Food Security Strategy as it cuts across all the strategic directions," said H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, speaking at the event.

"ICBA is leading the field in this vital area and is a hub for conducting essential applied research and development that is improving the way we produce food. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them on their 20-year anniversary and to commend them for playing a pioneering role in ensuring that the challenges of climate change and other threats to agriculture are being successfully overcome so that no person – irrespective of where they live in the world – need to go hungry," Her Excellency added.

The open day was also held to recognise the contribution of local farmers to food security in the UAE and celebrate their innovative spirit and thinking. During the event, several farmers received awards for their previous pioneering work with ICBA to take the research results to the field.

During the event, Her Excellency Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak remarked: "ICBA celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. As one of the center's main supporters and partners, the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi is proud of ICBA's achievements over the past two decades, which have seen the center implement research-for-development programs in over 30 countries. It has also worked closely with different government and research institutions in the UAE, focusing considerable efforts to promote efficient farming and agriculture across the country. As a result, ICBA has identified and developed many crops and technologies suited to the unique local conditions of the UAE. I am confident that

today's event will create new opportunities for collaboration in this vital economic sector, both locally and globally."

Speaking of the event, Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Director General of ICBA, commented: "By organizing this event, we wanted to reach out to the farmers and agri-businesses in the UAE and show them the technologies and crops that our scientists have found to work well in the local conditions. Over the past two decades, our center has gathered a wealth of knowledge that we are happy to share with all of our stakeholders, and specifically farmers. In this regard, the open day served as an opportunity to showcase our agricultural innovations and solutions for the UAE ecosystems, acknowledge the contribution and initiative of our local partners to this work and form closer and stronger partnerships for the future."

Since 1999, ICBA has been working with farmers and other partners in the country to introduce crops and technologies suited to the local conditions.

One crop that has shown a lot of promise in the UAE is quinoa. Thanks to work led by ICBA in collaboration with local partners, the number of farmers cultivating quinoa in the country is steadily increasing. As part of this work, ICBA has since 2016 been distributing quinoa seeds to a number of pioneer farmers in the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Ajman and Sharjah.

Scientists have also tested several modern irrigation technologies that help to save 20-50% of irrigation water compared with traditional technologies like surface and sub-surface drip irrigation, sprinklers, and bubblers. They have also used sensors to better control soil moisture and estimated the water balance not only at the farm level but also at the national level using remote sensing and satellite images.

ICBA has also conducted research on irrigation with reject brine and seawater on inland and coastal modular farms. The inland modular farm uses desalinated water for vegetables, reject brine for fish, and aquaculture effluents for halophytic plants, while the coastal modular farm uses seawater for fish and aquaculture effluents for halophytic plants like Salicornia.

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is an international, not-for-profit research-for-development organization that aims to improve agricultural productivity in marginal environments through identifying, testing and facilitating access to sustainable solutions for food, nutrition and income security.
www.biosaline.org