

ICBA, UOWD join forces to support food system resilience in UAE

Dubai, UAE, 19 May 2021 – The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) and the University of Wollongong in Dubai ([UOWD](#)) agreed today to work together to develop a suite of innovative tools for bolstering the resilience of the UAE's food system.

Under a cooperative agreement signed by Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Acting Director General of ICBA, and Professor Mohamed Salem, President of UOWD, the two institutions will carry out a joint project aimed at providing policymakers with a holistic analytical framework for monitoring and assessing a wide range of factors impacting on food security at the national, regional and global levels.

Harnessing the power of big data, the project will produce, among other things, a platform for evidence-based policymaking and a system for assessing vulnerabilities and responding to risks to food security.

As part of the project titled “Resilient agrifood dynamism through evidence-based policies” (READY), ICBA and UOWD will also formulate policies and actions to help make the country's food system more resilient to supply shocks and disruptions. Moreover, the project will design a dedicated knowledge portal and a database, as well as create a set of scenarios and models.

Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Acting Director General of ICBA, said: “Over the past 20 years, we have worked with decision-makers and other stakeholders in different countries to develop strategies and solutions for sustainable agricultural development and food production. We have also created various tools for supporting decision-making processes. Building on our past experience and success, we are very happy to partner with UOWD to do our part through this new project to help strengthen the resilience and sustainability of the food system in the UAE. The outcomes of the READY project's tools will not only serve as a basis to develop a set of national policies and integrated actions but hopefully will support in developing capabilities and strengthening the capacities of youth in future research. We hope its outputs will serve as valuable components of the nation's initiatives on food security and self-sufficiency.”

Professor Mohamed Salem, President, UOWD, said: “As an innovative and forward-thinking higher education provider in the UAE, UOWD is proud to partner with ICBA on the READY project, a future-focused initiative that aims to strengthen food security in the country. As an arid country that traditionally relied on imports to meet its food requirements, food security and diversifying food sources are crucial priorities for the UAE with the country seeking to address its myriad challenges in this space at scale. Through leveraging the resources of our research department, UOWD is pleased to facilitate data and analyses to enable decision making, policy development, and strategic planning processes. In doing so, our collaboration with ICBA will empower the concerned government departments to enhance local agricultural practices and ensure the sector's robustness under all circumstances.”

The project will also develop an early warning system which will help policymakers anticipate potential challenges and take proactive measures. More importantly, it will offer a roadmap for transitioning the UAE's food system to a more energy-efficient, sustainable, and resilient model. Ultimately, it will contribute to broader efforts on food security and self-sufficiency in the country and benefit society as a whole.

The project is coordinated by Dr. Ioannis Manikas, Associate Professor at UOWD and the READY project's principal investigator, and Dr. Khalil Ammar, Program Leader on Sustainable Natural Resources Management at ICBA.

The project's outputs are aligned with the goals of the [National Food Security Strategy 2051](#). The strategy envisions that the UAE will become a world-leading hub of innovation-driven food security and reach the top spot in the [Global Food Security Index](#), compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit, in 2051.

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is a unique applied agricultural research center in the world with a focus on marginal areas where an estimated 1.7 billion people live. It identifies, tests and introduces resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies that are best suited to different regions affected by salinity, water scarcity and drought. Through its work, ICBA helps to improve food security and livelihoods for some of the poorest rural communities around the world.

www.biosaline.org

About University of Wollongong in Dubai

University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD) is the first international university in the UAE and the premier Australian university in the region. Established in 1993 by the University of Wollongong Australia, UOWD is accredited by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) of the UAE Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and is licensed by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA).

UOWD is the highest ranked Australian university in the UAE – its curriculum and teaching practices reflect those of UOW Australia, which ranks among the top 1% of universities worldwide. Offering over 40 higher education programmes across 10 industry sectors, the university has over 3,500 students from 108 nationalities and a global community of 152,000 alumni.

As part of its continued pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, industry engagement and student experience, UOWD inaugurated its new purpose-built 200,000-square-foot campus at Dubai Knowledge Park in 2020. Featuring cutting-edge technologies, modern architecture, and a mix of traditional and innovative learning spaces, the campus provides an enriched experience to meet the demands of today's student population, while supporting the teaching staff and community research projects.

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