

Agricultural Research and Extension Authority (AREA) Efforts to Improve Date Palm Production in Yemen

Since ancient centuries, date palm is being an important crop in Yemen. It ranks first among the fruit crops group, where cultivated area with date palm constitutes about 25 percent (23.6 thousand hectares) of the total fruit area, which produces more than 33.3 thousand tons per year.

The prevailed climatic and geographic conditions in Yemen make it suitable for planting and producing date palms. Agricultural enumeration in 2000 referred that there were 4 million date palm trees in Yemen, of which two-third were fruitful. Cultivation of date palm basically located in two main regions: Eastern Eminence, and Coastal Canton, where about two-thirds of the total number of palm trees, and 96% of total date palm cultivated area are in Hadar Mout and Hudiedeh provinces. Varieties of Hamra, Suqtri, Serfaneh, and Bqal are dominated. Date balance trade in 2003 showed that imports of dates (17.6 thousand tons) largely exceeded export.

Current Status of Date Palm Plantings

Most of date palm plantings in Yemen are irregular, where they are timberlands including all genetic classes of date palm as a result of not removing the offsets around mother plants and close distance between trees. These randomly cultivations led to poor productivity and low quality of date. Surface irrigation predominates, where underground water is a source of irrigation for 61% of the total date palm trees, followed by springs 32%, and streams 7%. Agricultural practices including fertilization, easing fruits, and crop care are defaulted by most farmers, evidenced by low productivity (29 kg/tree/ year) comparing with neighboring countries.

Obstacles of Cultivation and Production

- Agricultural and technical obstacles: cankers and diseases; lack of technical and specialized staff; heavy and random cultivation; insufficient agricultural practices; inadequate modern dams; unavailability of central nurseries; and poor agricultural extension services.
- Marketing and economic obstacles: poor marketing of



A pilot demonstration on Date Palm- Mejraf Local Variety

date palm; lack of handling procedures (packing and processing); high production cost (labor).

- Social and human obstacles: land fragmentation; poor infrastructures; urbanization; difficulty in access to soft loans; unavailability of specialized associations and alliances.

Suggestions for Development of Date Palm Production

- Prepare a medium-term plan on research and studies for the period (2007-2011)
- Build the technical staff capacities and involve them in high graduate programs, training courses, conferences and seminars.
- Promote agricultural extension services, and stressed on media campaigns, including awareness for population on importance of date palm
- Establish pilot demonstrations and nurseries to provide improved date palm varieties
- Establish specialized alliances for producing and marketing of date palm
- Introduce mechanization for harvesting and modern irrigation techniques
- Build dams to maximize the utilization of water

streams

- Improve infrastructures especially in date palm areas
- Provide post-harvest facilities (packing, packaging, and processing)
- Set up legislations that promote investment in production and marketing of date palm.

AREA Efforts to Improve Date Palm Production

The Agricultural Research and Extension Authority (AREA) efforts to improve date palm production include:

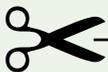
- A pilot field has been established to collect genetic resources, where 42 of local date palm varieties were gathered, and 4 new international varieties introduced (Barhi, Khalas, Sukari, and Sultanah varieties).
- A field survey was carried out for all date palm varieties in the main cultivation areas
- A program on the improvement of date palm production in Hader Mout Valley by cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization and Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation was implemented
- A palm tissue culture lab has been initiated for propagation of local and rare varieties, and producing free-diseases and cankers offsets, where it expected to operates in 2007
- Organize training course for farmers, technicians,



(AREA Chairman, Dr. Ismail A. Muharram and other specialists from AREA while inspecting a date palm demonstration field nearby Seiyun.)

extension agents, and researchers.

- Prepare studies on control of palm cankers and diseases, fertilization, morphological features, productivity of date palm varieties, and others.
- Organize and participate in relevant local, regional, and international conferences, seminars, and workshops.
- Technical participation in campaigns on controlling of palm cankers and diseases
- Introduce consultancies and technical services for producers of date palm, and prepare booklets on main date palm varieties.



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