

## DEVELOPMENT

# Levy to back research on date palms

A small tax can help fund study that is crucial 'to improve sustainability and production of the trees'

BY SHIREENA AL NOWAIS  
Staff Reporter

**Abu Dhabi** The International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (Icarda) plans to introduce a levy on the palm production industry to fund more research, the director general said yesterday.

"Many research programmes should be developed to generate knowledge to improve sustainability and production of palm trees," Dr Adel El Beltagy said.

## Agro-management

"A small levy can help fund research that is crucial for producers in terms of farming, packaging and distribution.

## GROWTH

### Turning attention to the farming sector

Figures by the Ministry of Planning show that the UAE has pumped Dh8.3 billion into the farming sector over the last five years.

Such funds have turned the farming sector from a negligible part of the economy into a major component of the gross domestic product.

The agricultural sector's contribution to the GDP has grown to Dh7.5 billion in 1999 from Dh6.3 billion in 1998; from Dh9.04 billion in 2000 to Dh9.7 billion in 2001 and to Dh10.5 billion in 2002.

Planning ministry's figures show the UAE has become one of the biggest date producers in the world.

"But we don't have enough information on the gene characteristic of palm trees in the region," he said. "Also, agro-management and post harvest processing and handling methodologies need to be improved."

El Beltagy was speaking

on the sidelines of a three-day regional workshop entitled Date Palm Development in the Arabian Peninsula, which was held in cooperation with UAE University and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Another problem, he said,

is controlling pests that affect the trees. The workshop, opened by Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, will assess the problems and constraints facing the development of date palms and prepare a scientific programme based on modern technology to overcome the problems.

Theib Oweis, Icarda's water management specialist, said water conservation is another major concern among governments.

"Icarda is collaborating with research institutions to develop programmes to reduce the amount of water given to each palm tree. Water is a critical resource

and palm trees require a lot of water. Through research, the same amount of water used for one tree can be used for many more. We want to improve the palm tree itself by making it more economical, productive and free of diseases," he said.

## Scientific journal

Icarda also plans to publish a scientific journal on palm trees.

"Icarda is taking on an additional role in the Arabian Peninsula through its palm development project, which comes in response to a decision by the GCC Ministers of Agriculture," said Saeed Mohammed Al Raqabani, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.