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## GRDC Activity

### Research - ICARDA visit highlights R&D opportunities

Collaboration with ICARDA, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, will be stepped up following a recent GRDC trip to its headquarters in Aleppo, Syria. ICARDA is part of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and in the same stable as the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CYMMIT). GRDC chairman Terry Enright and program manager Dr Richard Brettell visited the research centre to discuss ways that Australia and ICARDA could further work together.

Dr Brettell says there are important similarities between the two regions, most importantly in climate. "We also share a lot of the same breeding objectives, so working together will be of mutual benefit and help deliver the goal of 'better varieties faster'."



*[Photo (left): ICARDA senior entomologist Dr Mustapha El-Bouhssini (left) and the GRDC's Richard Brettell and Terry Enright (right) discussing resistance testing for Hessian fly, which does not occur in Australia, but is considered a potential threat.]*

The visit involved meetings and laboratory and field visits with scientists involved in genetic resource conservation, breeding, biotechnology, integrated pest management (IPM), agronomy, water-use efficiency, marketing, seed production and crop/livestock integration.

Two Australian researchers at ICARDA, Dr Colin Pigginn and Dr Ken Street, are already managing projects part-funded by the GRDC and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). Dr Pigginn heads up a new program - 'Diversification and Sustainable Improvement of Crop and Livestock Production Systems in Dry Areas'. Dr Street is working on plant genetic resource conservation in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The work being done at ICARDA and the similarities between the southern Australian and northern Syrian environments - including dry summers and drought, pests and diseases, weeds, soil management and rotations - impressed the GRDC team.

As the ICARDA region is the centre of origin of many of Australia's temperate cereal, grain and oilseed crops, it is important that collaborative research links with the region are maintained. The visit identified many opportunities for enhanced collaboration, including breeding (traits, markers, accessions), crop protection (diseases, pests), access to hot-spot locations to evaluate plant resistance and pest/disease biology, plant genetic resources (collection, conservation, characterisation, evaluation) and capacity building and sabbaticals (post-doctorate and researcher exchanges).