

UWA collaboration with ICARDA

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Mr Geoff Smith, Executive Director COGGO and Prof. Kadambot Siddique, Director IOA, discuss collaborative opportunities with Dr Mahmoud Solh, Director General, and Dr William Erskine, Assistant Director General Research, ICARDA, Syria, December 2006.

The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) is one of the 15 centres strategically located all over the world and supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

ICARDA serves the entire developing world for the improvement of barley, lentil, and faba bean; and dry-area developing countries for the on-farm management of water, improvement of nutrition and productivity of small ruminants (sheep and goats), and rehabilitation and management of rangelands. In the Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA) region, ICARDA is responsible for the improvement of durum and bread wheats, chickpea, pasture and forage legumes and farming systems; and for the protection and enhancement of the natural resource base of water, land, and biodiversity.

Mr Geoff Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Grain Grower Organizations (COGGO) and I visited ICARDA during 10-13 December 2006. The purpose of our visit was to explore opportunities for collaboration and funding; and to discuss progress and future plans for the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) funded projects, on plant health management in pulses in the CWANA region and germplasm conservation and crop production in Iraq.

Mr Smith presented a seminar on COGGO activities, describing current projects and potential investment opportunities. Two key areas were identified for collaboration between ICARDA, COGGO, and UWA: Ascochyta blight resistance in kabuli chickpea, and Fusarium head blight resistance in spring bread wheat. ICARDA has developed (and continues to develop) several resistant varieties of both crops, which have been released in Australia or are potentially suited to Australian conditions.

Future collaborative opportunities between ICARDA and UWA were discussed in areas of undergraduate and post-graduate training with potential candidates from the region (including co-supervision by ICARDA scientists), staff sabbatical leave at UWA/ICARDA and joint publications. Priority areas of training included: plant breeding and molecular genetics, natural resource management, water management and integrated disease and pest management. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ICARDA and UWA is currently being finalised to cement the relationship.