

## No chickening out to drought

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Dubai: Hommous will withstand global warming thanks to a new breed of chickpea which survives drought, thus saving the livelihood of thousands of farmers in arid areas.

Although not grown in the UAE, the chickpea called Gokce can be consumed here as Hommous bi-Tahineh, said Rajinder Malhotra, Senior Chickpea Breeder from the Biodiversity and Integrated Gene Management Programme at the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA).

### Turkish contribution

The new chickpea variety has been developed by agricultural scientists in Turkey. The chickpea can be imported in large amounts from Turkey or a small sample such as a few grams from ICARDA, if needed, said Malhotra.

According to Dr Riad Obaidi from the Organic Farming section at the Ministry of Environment and Water in Dubai, chickpeas are an important legume in arid countries for its ability to withstand high temperatures.

No chickpea is grown in the UAE because it needs to be watered extensively, added Obaidi.

"The Gokce chickpea has been under trial for a long time and it is an important crop in arid regions. They have a good resistance to drought and are planted in Pakistan, Mexico and Syria," he said.

Chickpeas are legumes whose roots need to be inoculated when they are in the ground.

"If the temperature is too hot the inoculation process will not happen, and the plant will be short and seeds inside the pouch will be small and hard," Obaidi added.

Every year crops worth hundreds of millions of dollars are lost and thousands of farmers are driven towards economic despondency because of drought. Climate change and global warming are increasing the threat of reduced rainfall and availability of water for agriculture.

Gokce has proved itself by surviving the current drought in Turkey and produced an impressive yield in severely adverse weather conditions.

Gokce is not only drought tolerant but also has moderate tolerance to Ascochyta blight, a disease that devastates chickpea crop.

It has survived the acute drought in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey that has wreaked havoc for farmers. In most areas where wheat, barley, and other crops have failed, Gokce's yield has been high.