



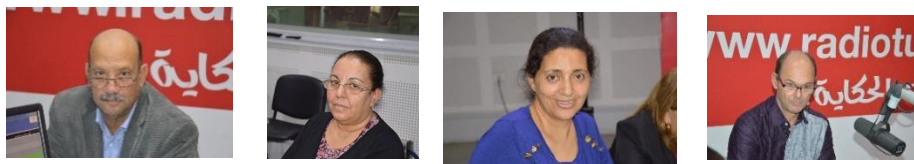
On Air in Tunisia: ICARDA with famous farmer and fellow scientists to discuss agricultural innovation

“Mind the Gap” is an ICARDA-led project in Tunisia (2016-2019) that looks at different agricultural extension methods to introduce and scale technical innovations among small-holder farmers. The project works in particular on the introduction of a drought tolerant barley variety, called Kounouz and a feed resource technology called “feed blocks”.

With the aim to share the new knowledge even further, ICARDA and its national partner AVFA (Agence de Vulgarisation et Formation Agricole / Agricultural training and extension agency) was invited to take part in one of the regular radio shows targeting agriculture and information for farmers in Tunisia. The state-owned “Radio Tunis” or “Radio National” as it is often called in Tunisia, is a national radio station which covers the entire country and broadcast in Tunisian dialect. For many farmers in rural areas the radio is a key source of news and information that would otherwise not reach them. Therefore, collaborating with AVFA, as a national agricultural service, on sharing regular news about agriculture via the radio during one of the shows in November 2018, was a unique opportunity to reach out to even the most remote areas

where communities often struggle to make a living as well as to learn about new ways and means to becoming more self-sustainable.

During the two-hour broadcast key topics from the “Mind the Gap” project was debated by Tunisian scientists and ICARDA and with one of the farmers from the project.



- Fethi Gouhis, OEP Central (Office de l'élevage et des paturages / Livestock agency of MINAGRI)
- Ahlem Ben Amour, AVFA (Agence de Vulgarisation et Formation Agricole / Agricultural training and extension agency)
- Hajer Benghanem, INRAT (Institut National de Recherche Agronomique de Tunis / National Agricultural Research Institute of Tunis)
- Udo Rudiger, ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas)
- Monia El Ayed, OEP Central (no picture available)

Udo Rudiger as the project coordinator from the international agricultural research institute ICARDA explained about the main areas of intervention in Tunisia involving crop – livestock integration, pasture management, feed resource technologies, and germ plasmas: “Being able to speak to farmers beyond our project areas is important as we would like to reach out to as many farmers as possible with tangible advice that can make actual and lasting impact on their livelihoods. “Mind the Gap” is a project where we want to find out in which respect different extension methods have an impact on the adoption of innovations by smallholder farmers – and so, reaching out to a diverse range of farmers is essential,” Udo Rudiger tells.

700 farmer households have been involved in the project that has included a series of trainings and experiments with new and improved crop varieties and technologies. Farmers have been taught about agricultural economics, farmer cooperatives, female empowerment and access to credit.

The advantages of the new barley variety Kounouz which was developed by INRAT in collaboration with ICARDA, who provided suitable germ plasma is a drought tolerant variety which is well adapted for semi-arid regions with limited rainfall. Hajer Benghanem from INRAT explained: About 40% of the trained farmers have already tested the new variety during the 2017 / 2018 season. Between April and May 2018, nine field days have taken place at the INRAT research station in Mornag, where 560 farmers were invited to observe the performance of Kounouz compared to the commonly grown Rihane variety,” she said.

The other introduced innovation is the feed block technology; the combination of different agro-industrial by-products like olive cakes, tomato pulps, wheat bran, cactus pulps, etc. together with Urea, mineral salt and lime. Monia El Ayed explained during the radio program about the advantages of the feed blocks that are made of mainly locally available material and how their ingredients are combined in such a way that it provides a rich feed for small ruminants. During the Mind the Gap project, a number of technical trainings and demonstration days were held at OEP stations for 560 infarmers who were then able to bring home the new technology and try it out at their farms.

Ahmed ben khdhiri Bemri, one of the 700 farmers the “Mind the Gap” Project is working with, keeps small ruminants and grows barley in Ouslatia, a semi-arid region in central Tunisia. He has participated at several trainings like technical trainings on feed blocks and Kounouz, field visits, farmer business and cooperative training. He bought Kounouz already twice (in 2017 and 2018). What convinced him most was the good performance of the new variety he saw at the INRAT field station in Ouslatia.

Belgacem Maaoui, director of an AVFA training center and at the same time an experienced trainer on cooperatives, emphasized during the radio program the importance for farmers to be organized in agricultural associations and cooperatives like GDA and SMSA. “Unfortunately, we still see that many farmers neglect the opportunity of being organized. Collective purchasing of inputs and bulk selling of their products can help increasing income for smallholder farmers and we have facilitated several cooperative trainings for 280 farmers of the project to explain about the procedures to create a cooperative,” he said.

The 700 farmers will continue to be invited for diverse training sessions in the first semester of 2019, and will receive technical SMS regarding the promoted technologies and other relevant feed resource information. On a weekly basis farmers receive this information with technical advises and links to the access of Kounouz seeds and feed blocks.

More about “Mind the Gap”: (<https://www.icarda.org/dryWire/mind-gap-bringing-climate-smart-solutions-field-tunisia>)