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Promoting sustainable solutions to overcome feed shortages

Submitted by DrylandSystems on December 4, 2014

Livestock farmers across the Dry Areas of the world are forced to contend with multiple constraints – not least the limited availability of feed, a resource that is becoming scarcer with the effects of climate change: lower precipitation, more prolonged droughts, and higher temperatures.

Closing this growing feed gap was the aim of a recent workshop in Tunisia, delivered by Dryland Systems researchers and national partners, which explored strategies to sustainably increase the availability of feed resources.

Part of an initiative to promote alley cropping and conservation agriculture in lowland pastures, researchers will work alongside farmers and rural communities to identify measures that restrict over-grazing and revitalize once-degraded rangelands.

Alley cropping and conservation agriculture are proven techniques that balance the needs of dryland communities and the environment. While the former involves inter-cropping fodder crops with trees or shrubs, the latter relates to minimum or zero-tillage. Both help to retain vital nutrients, improve soil structure, and conserve water.

Activities are planned for sites in Yemen, Tunisia, and Jordan – identified with the participation of local communities – where current practices are currently endangering the long-term sustainability of production systems.

Over-grazing, continuous cropping without rotation, and barley mono-culture, are all taking their toll: reducing biodiversity, threatening food security, and with fewer natural resources, raising the possibility of inter-communal conflicts.

In response, the Project is implementing an ambitious plan. While initial stages will involve baseline studies to better understand indigenous knowledge related to the management of lowland rangelands, scientists will subsequently implement a range of interventions to identify best-bet options for rangeland communities – including different water harvesting techniques, shrub types and inter-cropping barley with or without forage legumes.

Workshop participants devised a work plan to take these activities forward, and outlined a strategy for dissemination to ensure that successful interventions are scaled-out and made available to communities elsewhere who are struggling with the impacts of over-grazing and climate change. A series of factsheets and pamphlets will document successes as the initiative progresses.

The Project - 'Enhancing Sustainability and Fodder Production of Lowland Pastures through Integrated Alley Cropping and Conservation Agriculture in Arid Agro-Pastoral Ecosystems' – is working within the Tunisian action site of the Dryland Systems program, and is funded by the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID).

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