

Synthesis report on national workshop on forage seed sector in Tunisia

The Office of Livestock and Pasture in collaboration with ICARDA and FAO organized a national workshop on the production and marketing of fodder and pasture seeds in Tunisia. This workshop brought together the main actors such as seed producers, the main development agencies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources and Fisheries, the national agricultural research institute IRESA, ICARDA experts and farmers organizations, to reflect on the problem of the production of fodder and pasture seeds.

At the opening of the workshop, the Secretary of State to the Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources and Fisheries, in charge of agricultural production, said that the ministry is waiting with great impatience and a lot of the relevant recommendations that will emerge from this work given the quality and diversity of the participants. He also welcomed the relevance to be given to the organizers of the workshop. He asked all the professionals and administrations concerned to initiate a reflection, with a view to elaborating a strategy for the seed sector in Tunisia and a plan of action for its development.

The first day was devoted to presentations on the current state of the forage and pastoral seed sector at the level of production, supply, research, legislation and encouragement. An overview was presented on international experience in terms of public-private partnership and FAO's support for the organization of the sector. These presentations showed that the use of local certified seeds by farmers is the most effective means of promoting and disseminating genetic progress and contributes significantly to the increase in productivity.

The seed sector in Tunisia has undergone sustained development and growth in recent years, which have resulted in the creation of a quality national plant genetic heritage, the introduction of appropriate regulations, the increasing use of quality seeds by farmers and the emergence of private operators and professional associations. However, in recent years, this development seems to be running out of steam, leading to its stagnation or regression. This can be seen through various indicators, including:

- A stability or a decrease in the creation of varieties;
- A controlled seed use rate that remains low;
- The emergence of the parallel market of uncontrolled seeds;
- A halt to the development of the private producer sector and a multiplicity of importers.

These indicators indicate the impact of structural and cyclical constraints, which impede the further development of the sector, in particular:

- Insufficient extension and supervision of the use of semen;
- The weak integration of multiplier organizations in the sector;
- Marketing problems, the importance of the uncontrolled informal sector, and a certain lack of professionalism of the operators explaining a lack of consultation and discipline at sector level.
- The lack of effective arbitration and inter-professional organization structures.

The second part of the workshop was devoted to group work. Four groups were formed:

Group A: Review and analysis of the strategy developed in 2013 (strengths and weaknesses).

Group B: Institutional integration and research program to meet the needs of the sector.

Group C: public-private partnerships and roles of professional organizations in the development of the forage and pastoral seed production industry.

Group D: Local production versus import of fodder and pastoral seeds.

In view of the work of the groups, it is necessary to remove certain constraints by setting up a three-year action plan whose main orientations are as follows:

Research

- Reducing dependence on the use of seeds that can be produced in Tunisia by developing a national varietal creation program;
- Strengthen university training in seed production technology;
- Strengthen the National Gene Bank's role in conserving and using promising local accessions.
- Varietal creation programs must be regionalized by involving users in their development
In production

Production

- In the case of pre-basic seed, INRAT (NARS) and the other breeders will continue, alongside the Office of Livestock and Pasture and the Directorate General of Forests, to cover national needs in this category, waiting for seed companies to invest more to take over;
- Strengthen the financial and human capacity of seed pre-breeding organizations.
- In the case of basic seed and certified seed, multiplication programs should be oriented more and more towards irrigated perimeters of sewage and favorable soil, with a view to securing production, stabilizing and improving income of farmers.
- Introduce a multiplication premium for certified seed.
- Protect locally produced seeds by introducing a customs barrier for imported similar products.

Use

- The State and all operators will have to take up in a concerted framework all the actions to promote and scale the use of semen, with a view to improving the current levels of use.

Professional organization and public-private partnership.

- With a view to successfully disengaging the State from this sector, it is necessary to promote the establishment of inter-professional structures to ensure the succession and management of seed activity.
- While progressively disengaging, the State will have to continue to intervene through its structures concerned to ensure the country's normal supply of seeds (in particular in years of drought and in terms of taking charge of storage costs for security stocks , multiplication premium and subsidy for locally produced controlled seed);

The proposed action plan, with the adopted guidelines, aims to adjust and update the strategy drawn up in 2013. In order to do this, the Office of Livestock and Pasture is responsible for setting up and coordinating a limited commission (with subcommittees) to monitor the update of the 2013 strategy.