



المنتدى العربي للبيئة والتنمية
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AFED Conference on Arab Food Security in Amman

Arabs import half their food

Priorities: improved productivity and regional cooperation

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The Arab region imports half the food it needs. However, Arab countries can boost their food production, primarily by improving productivity and irrigation efficiency, in addition to regional cooperation. These are key findings of a report on food security released today by the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) at the opening of its annual conference in Amman, under the patronage of his majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein.

Jordan's minister of environment Dr. Taher Al Shakhshir, representing King Abdullah, said that achieving food sufficiency in Arab countries requires a regional complementary cooperation. Referring to the flow of Arab refugees, he said that Jordan is experiencing an unprecedented food crisis which requires Arab and International cooperation. He urged "AFED conference to come up with recommendations that serve our nations."

Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi participated as official partner and Petra University as organizing partner in the conference, also supported by many regional and international organizations, development funds and the private sector.

The conference brought together 750 delegates from 54 countries, representing governments, corporations, international and regional organizations, agricultural investment bodies, universities, research centers, NGOs and media.

AFED's report *Food Security in Arab Countries* notes that Arab countries face serious challenges, mainly aridity, limited cultivable land, scarce water resources and population growth, in addition to serious implications of climate change. The food deficit is underscored by a self-sufficiency ratio of about 46 percent in cereals, 37 percent in sugar, and 54 percent in fats and oil. The report asserts that cooperation among Arab countries based on comparative advantage in agricultural and financial resources is a key option for enhancing food security at the regional level. The report includes for the first time a set of maps produced in cooperation with ICARDA, based on recent data, showing locations of water resources, arable lands and rangelands and the importance of regional cooperation in food production.

AFED's 2014 work report was presented by Najib Saab, AFED's secretary general, who said: "Amid escalating turmoil in more than half its territory, AFED had to adhere to its

mission to advance prudent environmental policies and action in Arab countries, based on science and awareness.”

The opening session included two statements by Dr. Adnan Badran, chairman of AFED’s board of trustees, and Razan Al-Mubarak, secretary general of Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi, and a keynote speech by HRH Prince El-Hassan bin Talal.

Sessions discussed the state of food security in Arab countries, the role of science and technology in water and food security, the impacts of climate change and conflicts on food security and the importance of enhancing the role of small farmers.

The conference continues Thursday with sessions on value chains, market shortages, options in GCC countries and Arab initiatives to enhance food security. Conclusions and recommendations will be released in a closing plenary.

Full AFED report can be downloaded from www.afedonline.org

Photo captions:

1. Opening session: King Abdullah’s representative, Minister of Environment Taher Al Shakhshir.
2. Najib Saab, AFED Secretary General
3. From left, Abdulrahman Al-Awadi, Najib Saab, Jordanian Minister Taher Al Shakhshir, Lebanese Minister Mohammad Mashnouk, Adnan Badran, Razan Al-Mubarak

Main facts and figures in AFED’s 2014 report on Food Security in Arab Countries

- Food imports of Arab countries amounted to US\$56 billion in 2011, projected to shoot up to US\$150 billion in 2050. Staple cereals constituted about 63 percent of the total.
- Cereal productivity in the Arab region is generally low, averaging about 1133 kg/ha in five major cereal producers (Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan, and Syria), compared to a world average of about 3619 kg/ha. Egypt is an exception, with an average of 7269 kg/ha.
- The annual renewable water resources per capita in the Arab region are less than 850 cubic meters, compared to a world average of about 6000 cubic meters.
- The combined value of grain post-harvest losses and wheat import losses amount to about US\$4 billion at 2011 import prices, which represents 40 percent of the wheat produced in all Arab countries in value terms. This is equivalent to about four month worth of wheat imports.

- 85 percent of fresh water is used in agriculture, with an average irrigation efficiency below 46 percent in 19 Arab countries, compared to a world average of 70 percent. Raising this figure the world average would save about 50 billion cubic meters of water annually, enough to produce over 30 million tons of cereals, equivalent to 45 percent of cereal imports.

- The report emphasizes the high rates of water withdrawals for agriculture, averaging about 630 percent of total renewable water resources in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, reaching about 2460 percent in Kuwait.

- The average annual renewable water resources per capita in the Arab region is less than 850 cubic meters, compared to a world average of about 6000 cubic meters. 13 countries are classified in the severely water scarce category, at less than 500 cubic meters per capita. The situation is so alarming in six of these countries, with less than 100 cubic meters per capita, that the report has created a special "exceptionally scarce" category for them.

- Only about 48 percent of municipal wastewater of about 14 billion cubic meters annually is treated. The amount used for agricultural irrigation does not exceed 9 percent of the treated wastewater in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, while GCC countries use about 37 percent of treated wastewater for agriculture.

- Work in some developing countries has shown that yields can be increased two to three times through rain-water harvesting, compared with conventional dry farming. Increasing average rain-fed cereal yield from its current level of about 800 kg/ha to two to three times would add between 15 to 30 million tons of cereal to current annual production of about 51 million tons in the Arab region.

- Arab countries, as a group, are self-sufficient in fish, but about 25 percent of meat demand is being met through imports. The report calls for increasing the production of fish and poultry and promoting their consumption instead of red meat, in addition to a shift towards less water-thirsty and more nutritive crops. This requires changes in food consumption habits.