

# Date Palm Network

## I. Rationale

- 1.1 Date palm, Phoenix dactylifera, is a major agricultural crop in the Near East and African Regions, and its economical role in the countries of these regions is well recognized.
- 1.2 The world date palm production (about 4.6 million tons in 1997) is concentrated mostly in the Near East and Africa. About 70% of it is concentrated in six countries namely; Iran (918131 tons), Egypt (750000 tons), Iraq (660000 tons), Saudi Arabia (649239 tons), Pakistan (536000 tons) and Algeria (387313 tons), 20% in another six countries, namely; UAE (250000 tons), Libya (130000 tons), Morocco (85000 tons), Oman (135000 tons), Sudan (175000 tons) and Tunisia (95000 tons) and the remaining 10% in 22 others.
- 1.3 Date palm is a crop capable of establishing a sustainable system in subsistence agricultural areas and thus plays an important social role in reinforcing the subsistence base of a large population group by helping settling in rural areas versus migration to urban centers .It also prevents soil degradation and desertification, thus protecting the environment.
- 1.4 Date fruits are one of the few exotic fruits in the world, and with the small amounts produced compared to the production of other fruits, date fruits should be looked at as a very precious agricultural commodity.
- 1.5 Although date palm cultivation in the date growing regions of the world has a long history, yet the product quality is still low, the field and post-harvest losses are quite high and the date products and byproducts can no doubt be improved and the product mix more diversified. Thus the improvement of the current status of date palm cultivation in the date producing countries of the region and the enhancement of the quality of date products have become a critical need that can't be overemphasized.

## II. FAO & AARINENA Role in Establishing the Date Palm Regional Network

- 2.1 An expert consultation, hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and supported technically and financially by FAO (AGP, RNE) and AARINENA, to study the feasibility of establishing a Date Palm Network for technical co-operation on date palm, was held on October, 13-14,1999 in Tehran to draft the objectives and guidelines of the network.. Representatives from the following countries participated in the meeting: Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya, Morocco, Namibia, Tunisia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Pakistan. During the meeting, three thrust areas were determined as priorities for future collaboration and common problems that need solutions were identified. These include the following:

## **2.2 Date Palm Production and Protection**

Conservation and propagation of date palm germplasm, and development of the different agricultural practices commonly used in different countries under different environmental conditions for the increase of production and improvement of the quality of fruits along with the development of pest disease programs, with particular emphasis on the Bayoud disease and red weevil, among others.

## **2.3 Post-Harvest and Processing Technologies**

Development of the overall post-harvest technology processes, including the preservation of the quality of the fruits and the improvement of the processing techniques for the production of premier products, both for export and local consumption.

## **2.4 Socio-economic and Commercialization**

Improve the economic welfare of the date palm farmers, particularly women, and promote date fruit and date product consumption and sales locally, as well as their exports world-wide. The private industry should play a major role in directing the efforts for the improvement of the date crop and economic return. Such is important because it will be in harmony with the market demand.

# **III. Proposed Regional Date Palm Technical Cooperation Network**

## **3.1 Description**

The regional network will be comprised initially of eleven countries, including: Islamic Republic of Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Libya, Pakistan, Oman, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan and Namibia, but other countries may join upon request at a later stage. The International and Regional organizations which have interest in date palm as well as donor countries and the private sector, including all stakeholders in the date palm chain from cultivation to processing and marketing, may also join the network as members. The roles of the FAO and AARINENA are to initiate action and provide support to programs but not for institutional core support. Initially, three networks will be established with others to be added in the future as deemed necessary and according to the availability of financial resources.

## **3.2 Objectives of Network**

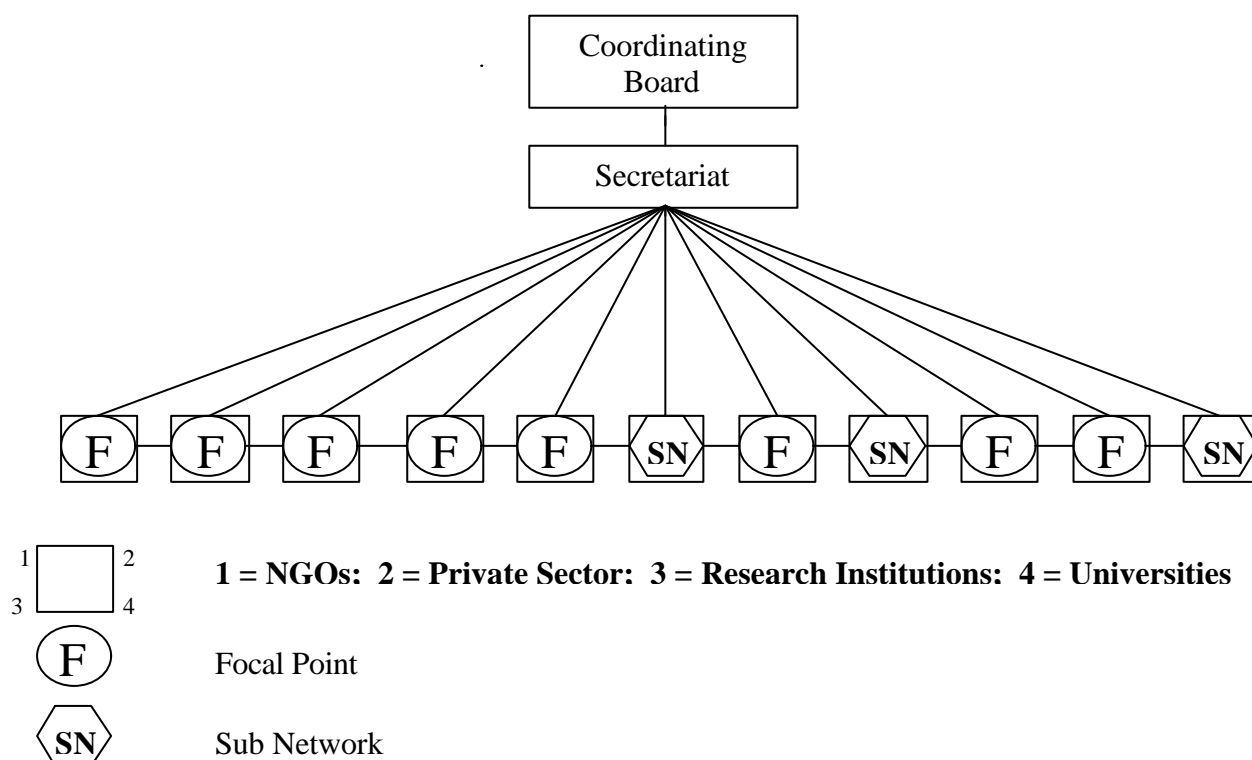
The long term objectives of the network are to mobilize the collective efforts of the date producing countries in the region towards achieving self-sufficiency in food, enhancement of the quality of life of their people, conservation of the eco-system and natural resources and development of the date palm agro-industry through the following:

- i) create awareness at various policy making and technical levels within member countries.

- ii) promote cooperation in the collection, conservation, propagation, evaluation and utilization of date palm germplasm.
- iii) develop a Date Palm Information System for the collection and dissemination of information.
- iv) Allow Joint programs for the exchange of experiences and expertise and organization of training courses, workshops and conferences.
- v) collate and/or develop common technical standards and specifications, as part of an overall quality control system for the marketing of date fruits and date products, in local and international markets.
- vi) enhance cooperation for the analysis and solution of common problems through joint research /development projects.
- vii) contribute to the formulation of national networks in each country to increase collaboration among national institutions , NGOs , private sector and universities.
- viii) Undertake promotional activities to promote the nutritional, social and ecological benefits of date palm.

### 3.3 Composition

The network will consist of the following bodies (see Chart):



## **Coordinating Board**

Made up of members from each of the participating countries that may represent institutions identified as the focal points or sub-networks .Board .Representatives may be selected from the NGOs , Private Sector, Research Institutions (Governmental and non-governmental ) and Universities.

## **The Secretariat:**

Forms the Headquarter of the Network and will be located in one of the institutions in one of the participating countries and will carry out the function of the Network.The FAO and AARINENA Regional Office for the Near East would provide assistance to the Secretariat.

## **Focal Points:**

Institutions, identified as focal points in member countries, may be either universities, research institutions or other competent, well established and renowned institutions depending on the set up and organizational structure in each of the countries in the region, will be the linkage among other institutions, NGOs, private industry and all stakeholders through out the date palm agro-industry chain in the country as well as the Regional Network, and shall include representatives from the NGOs, Private Sector, Research Institutions (Governmental and/or Non- Governmental) and universities .

## **Regional Sub-Networks :**

Priority areas on a regional basis, where cooperation among participating countries is needed for the development of these areas, have been identified and include the following:

- i) Production and protection
- ii) Post-harvest and processing technologies
- iii) Socio-economic and commercialization

Each sub-network will consist of one of the best qualified and competent institutions in each of the member countries which are most capable of contributing to the development of one of the specific areas identified above.

## **IV. Financial Requirements**

The long-term objective of the network is to gradually become self-supporting and assume more of its own expenses. However, at the initial stages, external inputs and technical backstopping are essential.

4.1 Other potential sources for covering up of some of the expenses include the following:

- i. Consultation fees when services of the expertise of the think tank are utilized by any of the countries. A certain percent (about 25-35%) of the consultancy cost is retained by the network as an overhead.
- ii. **Overhead cost for coordinating regional projects that are funded e.g. research, training, extension, conferences, etc.. (about 10% of the total)**
- iii. **Charges (reasonable and affordable) for providing information to prospective users, including the private sector.**
- iv. **Revenues from sale of developed promotional material, posters, standards, publications, etc..**
- v. **Revenues from advertisement on the web site of the date palm network by the private sector and other concerned groups.**

4.2 Donations and funds from national, regional and international organizations as well as the private sector. (A list of potential funding agencies is attached, Appendix II).

4.3 Contributions from the private sector, including date palm growers, wholesalers, processing plants, auxiliary industries supporting the date palm agro-industry, others.

*Note: Appendices available upon request.*