

## 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Agriculture

### **Item 4.6: Proposal for an International Year of Date Palm**

#### **Introductory notes**

The date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) is one of the oldest fruit crops cultivated in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and nowadays in many parts of arid and semi-arid regions of the world.

The date palm is an important income-generating crop, providing a major source of export earnings and livelihoods for millions of rural small-scale producers.

It provides food and nutrition security to millions of people and is included as part of school feeding programmes and as energy providing snacks.

Traditional production and distribution systems dominate value chains, and while very good examples exist of companies and countries that are modernizing systems to be more sustainable and to expand exports, scope remains for significant advances.

Constraints to sustainable production include access to improved genetic resources, diversification strategies, and practices to more efficiently manage water, pests (such as the red palm weevil) and diseases.

Constraints to market access include mechanised harvesting and access to appropriate services for post-harvest handling and processing.

The date palm is tolerant to drought, salty and alkaline soils. Therefore, the crop can contribute to the sustainable development of agriculture systems allowing efficient utilization of natural resources for the improvement of nutrition and socio-economic status of farmers and rural populations in drylands. However, date palms remain underutilized and demands immense global recognition.

During the last FAO Conference on 27 June 2019 in Rome, Italy, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia initiated a side event “Promoting dates as extraordinary fruits for economic, environmental and social development”. The event increased awareness and promotion of partnership opportunities among the date producing and importing countries.

Further promotion, through an international year of date palm, would enable national governments, academia, regional institutions and the private sector, to collaborate towards transforming this agricultural sector, important to so many countries around the world.

The Committee is invited to:

- Review the proposal by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to establish observance of the International Year of Date Palm in 2027 and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.
- Review and amend, as needed the Draft Conference Resolution presented in Appendix A, and submit it for the consideration of the 165th Session of the Council for adoption by the 42nd Session of the Conference.

*Jingyuan Xia, Director, Plant Production and Protection Division, NSP*