

FAO Conference 41st Session Side event
**Promoting dates as extraordinary
fruits for economic, environmental
and social development**

Thursday 27 June, 15:30-18:30
Sheikh Zayed Centre
FAO HQ

*Samples of date fruits and refreshments will
be served at the Sheikh Zayed Centre after the event*



Background

The date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) has been cultivated since 4000 B.C. and is potentially the oldest domesticated tree in the world. It is difficult to identify the exact centre of origin for date palm, although evidence suggests this could be Iraq. However, what is certain is that date palm has served as a critically important staple food, a main source of wealth and is of unrivaled cultural importance in arid regions of North Africa and the Middle East.

Date palm is a multipurpose tree that provides fruit, fibre, sheltering material and fuel. In 2016, the world production of dates was valued at about USD 8.4 billion, while global trade amounted to some USD 1.2 billion, providing a major source of export revenues as well as of livelihoods and income for millions of rural smallholders. Through the economic activities they generate, date production and trade can make a positive contribution to the achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a number of Sustainable Development Goals. Leading date producing and exporting countries include Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Date palms are genetically diverse with several known varieties: 595 accessions are conserved in genebanks held in Afghanistan, Cuba, India, Jordan, Libya, Pakistan, Spain, Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, UK, USA and South Africa. In addition, there are 1104 accessions of date palm relatives (belonging to the same genus) conserved in genebanks that can be used for breeding purposes (WIEWS, FAO database).

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has up to now developed two specific commodity standards to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade: *Dates* (CXS 143-1985) and *Date Paste* (Near East) (CXS 314R-2013). The standards establish the key essential composition and quality factors (including labeling and packaging provisions), the use of food additives as well as other safety provisions related to food hygiene, contaminants and pesticide residues. A standard on fresh dates, focusing on quality requirements, is expected for adoption in 2020.

Objectives

The event to increase awareness, promote discussions and partnership opportunities among date producing and importing countries based on the following topics:

1. the extra-nutritive value and bioactive properties of date fruits
2. other commercial uses of dates and palm tree products
3. extraordinary potential of dates to deal with the risk of global challenges of hidden hunger, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia proposing dates as superfruit
4. date palm products: ready-to-use date products and derived products
5. understanding key driving factors of international trade and demand for dates
6. contribution of date palms to the International Year of Fruits and Vegetable in 2021

Interpretation will be provided in Arabic, English, French and Spanish



Programme

TIME	ITEM
17:30 – 17:35	OPENING REMARKS Dr Mohammed Alghamdi <i>Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to FAO</i>
17:35 – 17:40	HIGH LEVEL REMARKS Maria Helena M.Q. Semedo <i>Deputy Director-General, Climate and Natural Resources, FAO</i> Eng. Ahmed Saleh Alkhmshi <i>Deputy Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture Saudi Arabia</i>
17:40 – 17:50	NUTRITIONAL AND HEALTH BENEFITS OF DATES Dr Reda MEZIANI <i>Head of the Regional Center of Agronomic Research, Morocco</i>
17:50 – 18:00	PROMOTION OF DATES IN EUROPEAN MARKETS Dr Mazen Alkhateeb <i>Organic Farming Development Project, PALLADIUM, Germany</i>
18:00 – 18:10	NUTRITIONAL AND HEALTH BENEFITS OF DATES Dr Munirah Al- Mssallem <i>Assistant Professor King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia</i>
18:10 – 18:25	DISCUSSION Moderator: Dr Mohammed Alnuwairan <i>Executive Director of the National Center for Palm and Dates</i>
18:25 – 18:30	CLOSING REMARKS Dr Suliman Alkhateeb <i>Director General of Plant Resources, Saudi Arabia</i>

Brochures will be distributed during the event

Organized by:

Saudi Arabia Permanent Representation to FAO



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Ministry of Environment Water & Agriculture
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia المملكة العربية السعودية