



Tropentag, October 11-13, 2006, Bonn

“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

Citrus Cultivation in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Contribution and Impact of a New Crop to the Development of ‘najran’ Area and Other Parts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Until the late 60th, ‘Najran’ region in the southern part of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had only few scattered citrus orchards. During the 70th, interest in growing citrus in the region was sporadic and most citrus cultivars were introduced from Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. However, the real breakthrough came in the early 80th when Najran Horticulture Development Research Center (NHDRC) was established as a pioneer project for development of citrus cultivation in the region. NHDRC immediately launched an ambitious programme to introduce certified citrus cultivars from internationally recognised propagation centres in USA and other parts of the world. Over the years, NHDRC succeeded to provide local farmers with huge amounts of adapted citrus cultivars to the region and other areas of the Kingdom. The impact of this development was particularly felt by Najran locals where huge improvements in farmer’s welfare, economy, social life, health and education were attained. The approximate total citrus acreage in Saudi Arabia is 37,500 acres with over 1.5 million trees. Najran region by itself possesses one-fourth of the total acreage. The period has witnessed tremendous research activities in NHDRC to develop the cultivation of this crop in the Kingdom. During the last few years more than 100 different citrus cultivars and rootstocks from all over the world were introduced and evaluated to select the best promising cultivars to Najran region and other parts of the Kingdom. Currently, NHDRC has the capacity to provide farmers annually with 100,000 — 150,000 certified citrus trees. Investment in this crop not only attracted the locals of the region, but other regions in the Kingdom as well. In fact, private companies in the last few years and up to this moment have planted thousands of citrus trees in other suitable areas of the Kingdom. This paper gives an overview of the progress and impact of this crop with the new challenges that need to be resolved to ensure further successful development. It is a successful story of a hard work that turned this part of the Kingdom into a very effective green belt in a desert country.

Keywords: Citrus, desert, development, Kingdom, najran, NHDRC