

Laayoune, April 30, 2019

## 1<sup>st</sup> LAAYOUNE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON BIOSALINE AGRICULTURE

"When research serves human development"

On May 3 and 4, 2019, the Phosboucraa Foundation, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, and the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) are organizing the 1<sup>st</sup> Laayoune International Forum on Biosaline Agriculture in Boucraa at the Phosboucraa Welcome Center. This major scientific event will feature high-profile speakers from around the world, who will discuss and present solutions for water resource management in desert regions, including the use of brackish water from different sources.

The organization of this International Forum on Biosaline Agriculture in the Laayoune region is no coincidence. It is the result of four years of scientific cooperation between the Phosboucraa Foundation, Mohamed VI Polytechnic University, the National Institute for Agricultural Research, and ICBA in the field of agriculture in saline environments in the Fous El Oued perimeter, in the Laayoune region. The results obtained at the Fous El Oued perimeter are an eloquent illustration of this successful cooperation, which has given farmers hope for the long-term exploitation of their perimeter despite salinity constraints.

The field work focused on the introduction of 19 crops that were tested in the Fous El Oued perimeter. Combined with training in agronomic practices in saline environments, this work has made it possible to fully understand the distribution and causes of soil salinity, to develop crop management practices that produce high yields and consequently to improve the income of farmers in the area. Among the flagship crops that will change the face of agriculture in the Fous El Oued perimeter are blue panicum, a protein-rich fodder grass, sesbania, which is a legume fodder crop, and quinoa, which produces an edible seed with a high grain yield averaging three metric tons per hectare with very good seed quality and size.

For the Phosboucraa Foundation, research and innovation are key factors in addressing human development challenges. The four-year investment has already been transformed into tangible actions, including the large-scale introduction of blue panicum cultivation and the launch of a development project, a source of income for 30 women in the Fous El Oued municipality. Quinoa has been integrated as the sixth ingredient in the local five-grain couscous, called "Khoumassi," to create a new local product: Soudassi couscous. The story of **Soudassi Couscous**, and especially of the 30 women assisted by the Phosboucraa Foundation, highlights the interest and impact of research when it serves the well-being of communities.

By holding the 1<sup>st</sup> Laayoune International Forum on Biosaline Agriculture, the Phosboucraa Foundation and its partners aim not only to respond to the pressure caused by the demand for irrigation water in arid areas, particularly those aggravated by the salinization as in Fous El Oued, but also to contribute to scientific discoveries that can transform lives. Thus, for two days, the city of Laayoune will be a platform for scientific exchange on the theme of "**Sustainable management of brackish water use in desert regions.**" This theme will be addressed from different angles, as the forum will focus on cross-collaboration between scientific disciplines, such as soil chemistry, plant sciences, irrigation science, agronomy, applied plant technology, and economics.



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**Guest speakers:** Jorge Batlle-Sales, University of Valencia, Spain; Ismahane El Ouafi, Director General of the ICBA, Dubai, UAE; Bas Bruning, Salt Farm, Netherlands; Mohamed Hachicha, INGREF, Tunis, Tunisia; Abdulrasoul M. Alomran, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Al Rusan Munir, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Jordan; Ragab Ragab, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, United Kingdom; Mushtaque Ahmed PhD, College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences, SQU, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman; Steve Green, Lesley Kennedy, Wellington, New Zealand.