

## Tunisia Wants Brazil's Technology on Growing Wheat

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Gathered in Brazilian capital Brasília, researchers of the Ministry of Agriculture of Tunisia and of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa), in the Savannah unit, elaborated a memorandum of understanding to begin partnerships in several areas of research. The main interest of the Arab country is in the greater production of durum wheat, which is harder and richer in protein, and barley.

"Our main interest today is in the production of wheat. It is another very important sector and we want to develop it. We visited Embrapa and went out into the field and to their laboratory and discovered that the Embrapa has very interesting things we can use. On the other hand, we can show them our work. There is mutual interest and we are going to help each other," stated Khalifa M' Hedhbi, director of the Grain Technical Center, in Bousalem, Tunisia.

Currently, Tunisia produces 80% of the durum wheat it consumes. With regard to soft wheat, the country only produces 20% of its needs. Production of barley is also 80% of domestic demand. "Our target is to become self-sufficient in durum wheat and barley. We must continue importing soft wheat as we do not have enough area to plant it," said the researcher.

According to him, the country's objective is to manage to increase production of soft wheat without increasing the area of cultivation and, in the case of durum wheat and barley, the target is to reach self-sufficiency.

"To increase productivity we came to Embrapa as they have means to help us. They have new technologies and I feel that, together with them, we may develop new varieties that may be resistant to drought and diseases. Embrapa also counts on other tools that may help us increase our productivity," he added.

One of the priorities of the memorandum is the exchange of genetic material of wheat and barley to expand the genetic base in our country. With the signing of a cooperation agreement, Embrapa Savannah should start a program for research with durum wheat, which is ideal for the production of macaroni and other kinds of pastas.

According to a press statement disclosed by the Embrapa Savannah, the best region for production of durum wheat in Brazil is the Savannah in the central region. In the text, Brazilian researcher Júlio Albrecht, of the team for genetic improvement of the Embrapa Savannah, who accompanied the Tunisians, said that there is mutual need to increment the varieties of wheat with greater volumes of gluten for the bakery industry.

According to Hedhbi, apart from the wheat and barley germplasm (seed) exchange, the agreement should allow for the exchange of several agricultural technologies and also exchange programs between researchers and students. With regard to germplasm, Hedhbi's greatest interest is in the exchange of seeds of varieties that are resistant to great heat.

This is the third time that the Tunisian researcher comes to Brazil. According to him, in the other trips the objective was not turned to greater production of wheat, but to the development of new technologies for the management of erosion.

"This time we came to discuss ways to increase production of wheat without increasing the area of cultivation, through exchange of scientists and researchers, for example. This will help reach our objectives as fast as possible," he said.

Hedhbi and researcher Moudi El Felah, who is the Research & Development director at the National Institute of Agronomical Research, in Tunis, the Tunisian capital, arrived in Brazil last week and visited the Embrapa Wheat, in Passo Fundo, in Rio Grande do Sul. During their visit to Brasília, the ambassador of Tunisia to Brazil, Seifeddine Cherif, accompanied them.

Anba