

The banner features logos for AgMIP, ICARDA (Science for resilient livelihoods in dry areas), CGIAR, and UM6P. The main title is 'Conference on Innovations for Sustainable Production of Neglected and Underutilized Crop Species in MENA Region'. It is 'Open for all' on '5-6 February 2024' in 'Rabat, Morocco, and via Zoom'. Logos for 'Initiative on Climate Resilience' and 'Initiative on Fragility to Resilience in Central and West Asia and North Africa' are also present. The background shows green chili peppers on a plant.

Neglected and Underutilized Crop Species (NUS) are increasingly recognized for fighting malnutrition, hunger, and the adverse impacts of climate change. Known for their resilience to harsh climates, NUS offers significant potential for enhancing dietary diversity and improving the sustainability of agriculture. These crops, often referred to as minor, orphaned, or underused, have been domesticated for various uses including food, medicine, and cultural purposes. They are nutrient-dense and economically viable, particularly in regions where conventional crops struggle due to rainfall variability and climate changes. However, the cultivation of NUS faces challenges primarily due to limited awareness, market access, seed availability, and insufficient research and extension services. There is a pressing need for innovative tools and approaches such as advanced agronomic techniques, digital agriculture, and practical policy frameworks to enhance the profitability and sustainability of NUS farming.

Addressing these challenges, ICARDA and partners are leveraging its partnership with the Agricultural Model Intercomparison and Improvement Project (AgMIP). AgMIP, a global initiative, focuses on understanding climate change's impact on agriculture, combining climate science, bio-physical and socio-economic models, value addition and market promotion, sustainable cultivation practices, and policy formulation for improving food security. ICARDA, in partnership with the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P), has launched AgMIP-MENA. This initiative, through advanced crop simulation modeling, aims to specifically enhance the resilience of NUS crops in the MENA region. By leveraging AgMIP-MENA's insights, ICARDA and partners are set to improve cultivation, productivity, and economic viability, directly contributing to regional dietary diversity and the sustainability of agri-food systems amidst changing climate conditions.

Complementing this effort, global programs like Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) and AIM4Climate play a crucial role in promoting NUS and fostering innovation in climate-smart agriculture. These initiatives are particularly important in the MENA region, where NUS are vital for the economy and nutrition of vulnerable populations. Moreover, they are instrumental in catalyzing both public and private sector investments, which are essential for advancing climate change adaptation and the transformation of sustainable food systems.

In line with these efforts, ICARDA, UM6P, and AgMIP-MENA are organizing a MENA Regional Conference on NUS. This event aims to serve as a vital platform for sharing knowledge, fostering collaborations, and driving research and policy initiatives focused on these neglected crops. The conference is set to contribute significantly to a sustainable transformation in dryland agriculture, aligning with multiple Sustainable Development Goals including zero hunger, climate action, and poverty eradication.

The conference is a major step towards recognizing and utilizing the untapped potential of NUS in the MENA region. It represents a collective endeavor to secure a more resilient, sustainable, and food-secure future, leveraging innovation and collaborative efforts.

Focus Areas of the Conference



Digital Tools, Remote Sensing, Simulation Modeling: The conference invites submissions on development and use of simulation models and digital agriculture technologies, such as precision and climate-smart agriculture, data-driven tools, big data etc.



Crop Management and Good Practices: With a focus on sustainable practices, this conference invites papers around integrated and smart crop-, soil-, water-management practices that are hindering the adoption of NUS at scale that ensure sustainability with minimal environmental footprints.



Climate Resilience and Nutritional Security: The conference solicits papers exploring the adaptability of NUS to harsh climates and developed strategies for mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. It is crucial for envisioning adaptation and mitigation efforts, aligning NUS with future agricultural systems and development priorities.



Market Demand, Policy, and Consumer Preference: Recognizing the disconnect between small-scale production and consumer interests, the conference invites papers which address challenges faced by smallholder farmers due to poor marketing systems. Insights into consumer preferences will guide farmers in producing crops that are both marketable and financially rewarding.

Everything You Need to Know About the MENA Regional conference on NUS

- **Audience Focus:** This conference is designed for a broad spectrum of professionals, including researchers, R&D practitioners, policymakers, scientists, students, and extensionists. Attendees from National Agriculture Research and Development Centers, university faculty and students, and national and international research and development organizations, are encouraged to submit abstracts and participate.

- **Participation Options:** To accommodate diverse preferences, the conference provides both in-person and online (hybrid) participation options. Limited funds are available to support travel and accommodation for the best-selected papers affiliated with ICARDA partner organizations.

- **Important Dates:** Researchers interested in contributing to collaborative efforts are invited to register and submit their abstracts by the 30th of January 2024. The conference itself will unfold on the 5th and 6th of February 2024.

- **Recognition for Outstanding Contributions:** In a bid to acknowledge exceptional contributions, the conference will present cash prizes to the top three presenters. This is an incentive to foster high-quality research in neglected and underutilized crops.

- **Application Mode:** To be part of the MENA Regional Conference and contribute to the discourse on neglected crops, complete the abstract submission form by clicking [here](#). Select your preferred theme—Digital Agronomy, Resource Use Efficiency, Climate Adaptation, or Marketing and Consumer Preferences. Whether joining us in Rabat, Morocco, or participating online (hybrid) on February 5-6, 2024, your insights matter.

Partners

