

ICBA, BGI partner to set up advanced genomics center in UAE

Dubai, UAE, 7 May 2019 – To accelerate agricultural research and development in the world’s marginal environments, the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) and the [BGI Group](#), the world's largest genomics research institution, have agreed to establish a dedicated, cutting-edge genomics center in the UAE.

Named the Desert Life Sciences Center, the new facility will conduct in-depth studies of the genome structure of stress-tolerant crops like quinoa, Amaranthus, Salicornia, and others.

The cooperative agreement to this effect was signed by Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Director General of ICBA, and Dr. Ren Wang, Senior Vice President of BGI Group, during the 2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, China, on 25 April 2019.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Dr. Ismahane Elouafi said: “We are happy to sign this strategic agreement with BGI Group. The idea of having the Desert Life Sciences Center in the UAE is to harness the benefits of ‘Omics’ technologies (including genomics) to develop crops that are resilient to climate change and can thrive in desert environments. The center, among other things, will enhance biodiversity conservation and use, improve food security and nutrition, and will contribute towards sustainable development, especially in the marginal environments of the world.”

For his part, Dr. Ren Wang, Senior Vice President of BGI Group said: “We are excited to partner with ICBA for this significant initiative to establish the Desert Life Sciences Center in the UAE; this is in line with BGI’s vision to use genetic technology for the benefit of humanity. The DLSC will serve as a center of excellence to make a positive impact in the agricultural sector of countries like the UAE, by improving food and nutrition security.”

As a first joint venture between ICBA and BGI, the center will promote the application of modern genomics and biotechnologies in developing countries and will nurture young talent from China, the UAE, and developing countries.

As part of the agreement, a joint genomics research laboratory will be established at ICBA’s headquarters in Dubai to carry out collaborative research on climate-resilient crops. The areas of research include genomics studies of the plant genetic materials stored at ICBA; digitalized data storage and analysis; crop improvement; pest management (e.g. the Red Palm Weevil); and research and application of genomic technologies in broader areas such as nutrition and health.

As part of the collaboration, ICBA and BGI will also promote the improved climate-resilient crops in marginal areas of the world, and exchange staff for collaborative research and training in either the UAE or China.

As an applied agricultural research center, ICBA works to address current problems and future risks in marginal environments around the world. For the last two decades, the center has been identifying, testing and introducing resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies in salt-affected, water-scarce and drought-vulnerable regions. As a result, ICBA has accumulated extensive applied experience and developed tailor-made solutions to the problems of water scarcity, soil and water salinity, and drought.

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is a unique, not-for-profit applied agricultural research center in the world with a focus on marginal areas where an estimated 1.7 billion people live. It identifies, tests and introduces resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies that are best suited to different regions affected by salinity, water scarcity and drought. Through its work, ICBA helps to improve food security and livelihoods for some of the poorest rural communities around the world.

www.biosaline.org

About BGI

BGI was established in 1999 with the vision of using genomics to benefit mankind and has since become the largest genomics organization in the world with a focus on research and applications in the healthcare, agriculture, conservation, and environmental fields. BGI's goal is to make state-of-the-art genomics highly accessible to the global research community and clinical markets by integrating the industry's broadest array of leading technologies, including BGI's own sequencing platform, economies of scale, and expert bioinformatics resources. BGI's services and solutions are available in more than 60 countries and regions around the world.

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