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INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
BIOSALINE AGRICULTURE

International Women's Day: ICBA Concludes Fourth Cohort of the Arab Women Leaders in Agriculture (AWLA) Fellowship Program

- *21 women researchers from 9 countries completed the fourth cohort of the AWLA fellowship program*
- *Fellows presented capstone research on climate-resilient agriculture and sustainable land management*
- *The AWLA alumni community has expanded to 60 women researchers across the region*

Dubai, United Arab Emirates – 8 March 2026 – On International Women's Day 2026, under the theme "Rights, Justice and Action for All Women and Girls", the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) marked the completion of the fourth cohort of the Arab Women Leaders in Agriculture (AWLA) Fellowship Program, highlighting the growing role of women scientists in advancing agricultural innovation and climate resilience across the Middle East and North Africa.

Held within the United Nations-designated International Year of the Woman Farmer, the closing forum brought together around 50 attendees from ICBA's leadership and research community. During the event, 21 women researchers from nine countries presented their capstone projects, addressing key agricultural challenges including climate-smart crop production, soil-health innovations, sustainable management of the red palm weevil, and the use of date palm residues for livestock feed.

Dr. Tarifa A. Al Zaabi, Director General of the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA), congratulated the fellows and praised their achievements, stating: "Through AWLA, ICBA is investing in a new generation of women researchers advancing science-based solutions to the region's most pressing agricultural challenges. We are proud that the AWLA alumni community has grown to 60 women researchers, forming a strong network that promotes collaboration, knowledge exchange and greater impact in agricultural research across the Middle East and North Africa. As ambassadors



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of knowledge and innovation, these researchers play an important role in advancing resilient agrifood systems capable of addressing food security, water scarcity and climate pressures."

Dr. Tarifa added: "This effort forms part of ICBA's broader portfolio to advance sustainable agriculture in saline and arid environments while contributing to global development priorities. By strengthening women's leadership in agricultural science and innovation, programs such as AWLA support progress toward gender equality, climate resilience, sustainable land management and international collaboration—priorities that are central to the global development agenda and to ICBA's mission of delivering science-based solutions for sustainable food systems."

Participants from the fourth cohort also reflected on the impact of the program and the role of research in advancing sustainable agriculture across the region.

Dr. Faizah N. Al-Enezi, Associate Research Scientist at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), said: "Participating in the AWLA Fellowship has greatly influenced my research and leadership journey. The program strengthened my understanding of sustainable agricultural practices and the importance of empowering women in agriculture and science. I look forward to applying this knowledge with farmers and agricultural communities to support sustainable agricultural development."

Dr. Abeer Aburumman, Head of the Molecular Biology Research Department at the National Agricultural Research Center in Jordan, said: "The AWLA fellowship has been transformative, strengthening my leadership capacity and expanding my scientific vision in agricultural research. It equipped me with the skills to connect scientific innovation with practical solutions for complex agricultural challenges."

Ms. Aysha Alshamsi, Growth Chamber Technician at Silal, UAE, said: "Being part of AWLA reminded me that agricultural research is not only about experiments and data, but about people, farmers, and the future of our food systems. It motivated me to continue developing solutions that make agriculture more resilient and sustainable."



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Funded by the Islamic Development Bank, the Gates Foundation, and the CGIAR Research Program on Wheat, the AWLA fellowship supports women researchers working across agriculture, food security and nutrition in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region through leadership development, research collaboration and knowledge exchange. In line with the priorities highlighted by the International Year of the Woman Farmer, the initiative reinforces the importance of inclusive participation in science, governance and innovation, recognizing that gender equity in agriculture is a key driver of productivity, institutional effectiveness and long-term climate resilience.

Through programs such as AWLA, ICBA continues to support women researchers whose work contributes directly to agricultural sustainability, food security and regional resilience.

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About ICBA

Established by the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Development Bank, the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is a unique international not-for-profit applied research-for-development center. The center's approach integrates strategic alliances, technical expertise, and knowledge empowerment to co-create innovative solutions for sustainable livelihoods and food security in saline and arid environments. The center's research is at the nexus of soil, water, crops, and climate to prevent, manage and recover from salinity in agricultural lands. Through this holistic and integrated approach, ICBA strives to make a lasting positive impact on the lives and livelihoods of farming communities, ensuring their resilience and contributing to a more sustainable future for all. www.biosaline.org