

Information for GRAIN on IRRI meeting in KSA

30 August 2009

The following is information provided to GRAIN in response to a set of questions given to IRRI. GRAIN's questions are in italics and IRRI's responses are indented.

One of the meetings was a follow-up meeting with KSA government officials and business people. The notes state that the purpose of the previous "visit was to build strong ties with IRRI as the world leading rice research institute, capable of helping them [KSA] in their efforts to produce rice in areas that are not being traditionally used for rice production." The notes also indicate that during the meeting in Riyadh Dr. Zeigler advised the KSA officials on where to produce rice, singling out particular countries.

1. How did IRRI select this list of countries? Has IRRI conducted a study on the feasibility of outsourcing rice production in these countries for KSA or for any other governments/investors? Are these still the countries that IRRI recommends for KSA investment in rice production?

IRRI has not done any feasibility studies on the outsourcing of rice production for any governments or investors. IRRI is not involved in any projects on land acquisition for rice production, nor do we provide advice on land acquisition – this is not part of IRRI's mission.

In our research on future rice supply and demand scenarios we also assess the general potential for producing more rice in countries that have capacity for increased rice production as well as access to internal and external markets. Countries that have the capacity to increase rice production generally include those that are not highly populated and have good natural resources and climate for rice production. This may include countries such as Brazil, Sudan, Tanzania, Mozambique, or Mali. IRRI's general research strategy is to increase the productivity of rice on the existing rain-fed and irrigated land and do it in a sustainable manner. Any expansion into new areas must be done with great care. It must be sustainable, negative environmental consequences must be avoided, and it must be socially acceptable and to the benefit of rice farmers and consumers.

The notes say that there was discussion about the "need for guidelines from IRRI to develop a framework for what need(sic) to be accomplished in terms of research needs, target countries and needed support, etc."

They further mention a proposal for IRRI to submit a "5-year outline" that will "pinpoint the research areas that need additional support at IRRI and are relevant to the Saudi overseas initiative, approximate budget, and some directives for investments in overseas rice production." The notes seem to say that this would involve \$5 million in funding from RSA for IRRI.

2. Has IRRI submitted this outline as proposed? Have the "outline" or "guidelines" been agreed to? Can you explain further what this outline involves?

See response to Question 1.

As a non-profit organization IRRI seeks partners to undertake our research. All research that IRRI conducts is widely available and no research findings are exclusively available to any partner.

IRRI is continually seeking new partnerships and funding to support our research to achieve our mission to help improve the health and welfare of rice farmers and consumers. IRRI submits proposals to many potential donors to support our research and

we have submitted concept notes for research proposals to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that seek funding for research into aerobic rice (rice bred to yield well in unflooded / water-scarce irrigated conditions), grain quality, developing a global information gateway for better rice information, and the International Network for Genetic Evaluation of Rice (INGER). No agreement has been settled with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and currently no IRRI projects are supported by them.

3. Is IRRI also in discussions with other countries (or their companies) about producing rice in foreign countries for their own food needs? Are other centres of the CGIAR involved in such discussions?

IRRI meets with many different nations, organizations, donors, individuals, and the media to discuss the rice supply - demand situation. IRRI provides general information to anyone, based on the areas of research in which have expertise. While IRRI is happy to discuss and share our research findings, IRRI is not involved in land acquisition for rice production, nor do we provide advice on land acquisition. Our interest in these discussions is to raise the awareness about the role rice research can play in increasing the supply of rice, particularly to help reduce poverty and hunger, improve the health of rice farmers and consumers, and ensure that rice production is environmentally sustainable.

For information about what other CGIAR centers are doing you would need to contact them directly.

One of the meetings in Riyadh was with Foras. The notes say that Foras "is seeking IRRI's support and expertise to help" with its major rice project.

4. Can you explain what "support and expertise" are requested of IRRI? In what ways will IRRI be involved in this project? What about WARDA?

IRRI is not involved in any Foras projects other than providing general information we provide to anyone. The support and expertise IRRI offers relates to our research expertise in the sustainable production of rice to help rice farmers and consumers. We make general suggestions on suitable varieties or best management practices and the socioeconomic and environmental issues to consider.

IRRI and Foras signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in December 2008. This MoU formalizes a general relationship between IRRI and Foras and outlines that both organizations will seek mutually beneficial opportunities for research collaboration, which, from IRRI's perspective, means the research must relate to our core mission and be widely available to anyone.

IRRI has many MoUs with different public and private sector organizations. MoUs are one way of building relationships with partners and we hope to establish many more into the future to continue fostering partners within the public and private sector so that we can share our research more broadly and increase the capacity of our research to have an impact.

Foras does not currently fund any research at IRRI.

For information about Foras's needs you would be best to contact them directly. Likewise for information about WARDA you may like to contact them.

5. The notes mention the creation of a research unit to evaluate IRRI and WARDA varieties for the Foras project. Can you explain what this research unit involves?

There is no research unit for Foras at IRRI. See response to Question 4.

IRRI and WARDA have a joint research program dedicated to rice production in East and Southern Africa, which started in 2007. IRRI is continually evaluating its rice varieties for different regions around the world – this includes Africa. Any IRRI rice variety or IRRI 'breeding line' that can be turned into a rice variety is made widely available. No-one has exclusive access to IRRI-bred varieties or seed from our breeding lines. In our work in Africa, we have joint regional variety evaluation nurseries and trials with WARDA and funding for that comes from several public sector donors and non-profit organizations. There is no funding from any private investor or company and Foras are not currently a donor for any project at IRRI including within this program.

6. The notes mention discussion of the "Foras model" but then only mention the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes in Senegal and Mali. Could you please explain what the "Foras model" is?

For information on Foras including their investment models please contact Foras.

7. Can you confirm that IRRI was told by FORAS that the FORAS project "has already acquired 200,000 ha in Mali, 500,000 ha in Senegal and 10,000 acres in Sudan, all of which will be developed for rice production."? The notes also state that the FORAS project aims to develop 7-10 million ha for rice production. We were under the impression that the goal was 700,000 ha. Is the information in the notes correct?

To get the most up to date information about FORAS and their goals it would be best to contact them directly.

7. I gather that this "off-shoring" of rice production is going to be a featured topic at this year's International Rice Congress. Is IRRI developing a position on providing support to foreign investors in rice production? Is the CG?

The 3rd International Rice Congress (IRC2010) is a general forum for all aspects of rice science. The program for the IRC2010 that will be held in November 2010 has not been confirmed yet. For updates about IRC2010 you can visit www.ricecongress.com.

IRRI's mission is to help reduce poverty and hunger, improve the health of rice farmers and consumers, and ensure that rice production is environmentally sustainable. One aspect of IRRI's research to achieve our mission is to identify ways to increase the supply of rice which includes identifying countries that have capacity for increased rice production. IRRI is not involved in land acquisition for rice production, nor do we provide advice on land acquisition.