

June 04 2010 | Last updated less than one minute ago

gulfnews.com

UAE | Environment

[Share this article](#)

Salt-loving plants are the way forward

Research at ICBA has found that grasses such as Paspalum — that thrive on saline water — can be used for golf courses and in landscaping projects, cutting irrigation cost by half.

By Emmanuelle Landais, Staff Reporter

Published: 00:00 April 13, 2010



Dubai: A number of farmlands have been abandoned after crops failed due to a lack of fresh water in the underlying aquifers, however, it has been discovered at the International Centre for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) in Dubai, that many plants thrive in saline environments.

Dr Rashid Ahmad Bin Fahd, Minister of Environment and Water, and Dr Ahmad Mohammad Ali, Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank, signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday for the Ministry of Environment and Water to manage the centre.

In 2002, after years of minimal rain, which left catchment dams empty, farmers from Fujairah to Al Ain resorted to boring their own wells to tap into underground aquifers, and other ground-water deposits to meet their irrigation needs. Unfortunately this only boosted the salinity levels of underground water and depleted limited water resources.

Landscaping

Today, research at ICBA has found that grasses such as Paspalum — that thrive on saline water — can be used for golf courses and in landscaping projects, cutting irrigation cost by half. Other salt-loving grasses such as Sporobolus virginicus and Distichlis spicata have been proved to be excellent animal feed.

Under the MOU the centre will retain its international status and will continue to work to improve agricultural productivity, especially in plants tolerant to salinity, helping to develop sustainable farming opportunities in countries that suffer from water scarcity. Supported by the Ministry of Environment and Water and the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi, the centre will receive an annual budget of \$5 million (Dh18.3 million) and an additional \$2 million from the Islamic Development Bank for the next five years.

ICBA was established as a centre of excellence for agricultural research and the development of soil, salt water and brackish water to help meet the challenges of water and food security.

The centre has already started applying its second strategy, which focuses mainly on developing efficient water use to increase crop production.

Training programmes will continue to be organised to educate farmers and researchers on modern farming techniques and not wasting water during cultivation.