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# Svalbard Global Seed Vault returns seeds to Syrian Gene Bank

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In September 2015, 128 crates of seeds for a total of 38.000 seed samples from ICARDA, the International Gene Bank of Syria, were returned from Svalbard Global Seed Vault on ICARDA's request. The seeds will now be sown at ICARDA's research stations in Lebanon and Morocco. The seeds will be recultivated immediately to provide farmers, scientists and developers new, freshly grown seed material. Future plans call for a minor lot to be returned to Svalbard for further long-term vault storage. This is the first time a gene bank has retrieved seeds from the seed vault.

- I am glad that Norway is able to assist. This highlights what an important function the vault has in ensuring the genetic legacy on which future food production depends, says Sylvi Listhaug, Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food, in charge of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.



*Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food Sylvi Listhaug visit Svalgard Global Seed Vault. Credit: Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food*

## **About ICARDA**

The International Gene Bank of Syria (ICARDA) preserves more than 148.000 seeds of unique varieties of wild species and regional cultivars of barley, wheat, peas, beans and a range of forage crops, adapted to agriculture in dry areas. Presently, ICARDA registers a strong demand for seeds from researchers and farmers wanting to adapt crops to a drier climate. The gene bank in Aleppo is still operative, but the uncertain national situation impedes sufficient recultivation of seeds to meet the demand. ICARDA therefore has requested the Svalbard Global Seed Vault to return a large proportion of seed samples deposited there in a number of shipments since 2008, aiming to grow new seed supplies. Near the end of September, 128 crates of different seed species were lifted off the shelves and carted out of the vault. These shipments are now arriving at the new ICARDA Headquarters in Lebanon and ICARDA's Research Centre in Morocco. ICARDA still retains a majority of its seed deposits - around 80.000 species - in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.



*Athanasios Tsivelikas, head of ICARDA in Morocco. Credit: Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food*

Athanasios Tsivelikas, head of ICARDA in Morocco, who visited Svalbard to assist in arranging the shipment, says: -Since the very early beginning, ICARDA had realized the importance of the establishment of the Global Seed Vault. For that reason, ICARDA incorporated into its policy the shipment of all of its accessions to Svalbard, to the Global Seed Vault, in order to be safely duplicated for the future demands. Our hope is that in two or three years from now, we will be able to redeposit freshly cultivated seeds in Svalbard.



*Svalbard Global Seed Vault returns seeds to Syrian Gene Bank. Credit: Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food*

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